

**The Description and Use of Women's
Clothing in Eighteenth-century
England:**

**With special reference to the counties of
Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire**

Elizabeth Amy Spencer

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University of York

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Abstract

Where was women's clothing described in eighteenth-century England, and by whom? How was it described? And why? These are the questions at the heart of this thesis. Previous studies have already attempted to tackle some of them, focusing largely on the where and why. One of the key arguments which has emerged from this is that women used their clothing to engage in a form of feminine 'sentimental' consumption. Scholars argue that women described their clothing to express emotional meaning, which is betrayed in these 'meticulous' or 'careful' descriptions. I argue that these assumptions are long overdue a revision.

The thesis is in two halves, and the first tackles where women's clothing was described, by whom, and how. In chapters one and two, I identify a shared language of description across three sources – wills, newspaper advertisements, and account books. The description of clothing in these sources has been interpreted as emotional, but I argue that it cannot be read in this way; moreover, I outline a number of methodological issues with this approach. This has important implications for arguments about women and 'sentimental' consumption.

The second half suggests some more productive approaches to description, as well as the study women and clothing in general. In chapters three and four, I respond to calls in the scholarship to focus on things in use; however, I argue that we also need to explore how and why clothing was being used in different sources. Looking at court records and correspondence, I demonstrate that clothing could be used as a powerful rhetorical tool in different contexts, which speaks to wider understandings of its role.

I therefore make an original contribution in this thesis to the scholarship on women and consumption, as well as decisive interventions in the methodologies used for the study of it.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and that I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources have been acknowledged as References.

Introduction

In January 1764, Ruth Tennyson – a single woman living in Clifton near York – died, leaving behind a last will and testament in which she described many of her possessions. Amongst these things were a number of items of clothing, which were bequeathed to female family members, friends, and acquaintances. This list is far too lengthy to reproduce in full, but a few examples will suffice:

I give and bequeath unto my Aunt Tennyson a brown figured Night Gown of Silk, a Green coloured Sattan Petticoat, a white Dimmity petticoat, a plain Muslin Apron and a Cambrick Apron Also I give and bequeath to my Cousin Martha Mason a red Damask Night Gown with all the breadths belonging it Also I give and bequeath to my Cousin Ann Mason a black silk Gown and Petticoat... Also I give and bequeath unto Mrs. Dickinson my present Landlady a purple and white flowered Gown.¹

Nearer to the centre of the city, Dorothy Fallowfield of the parish of St. Mary Bishophill the Elder found herself in desperate need of assistance. She had been receiving financial and material relief from her parish on and off since 1759, but an illness which she developed in 1764 meant that she spent the entirety of the next two years living in the Poor House, as well as most of 1767. In these three years, the parish provided her with a number of items of clothing in addition to paying for her board. In 1764 it paid for 'Cloathing' for her, while she received 'a new Shift' in 1765, 'a Pettycoat' in 1766, and two more 'Shefts' in 1767.²

On 10 April 1767, the York Consistory Court heard the response of Catherine Ettrick to a number of claims submitted by her husband, William Ettrick of Sunderland:

¹ BOR, Dean and Chapter Court of York Probate Records, microform, reel 1254, Ruth Tennyson, January 1764.

² BOR, Parish Records of York St. Mary Bishophill Senior, PR/Y/MBps/22, Overseers of the Poor Account Book, 1759-1771.

This Respondent further saith that she denies she hath bought herself many other Gowns besides the Silk Gown Articulate with his Money save Common Stuff and Linnen Gowns and she denies that he the said William Ettrick hath bought her many very Handsome Gowns of Various Sorts and Great prices tho' this Respondent admits that besides the Common Stuff and Linnen Gowns before set forth her said Husband brought her from the East Indies three Chince Gowns but that the same turn'd out Rotten and bad this Respondent says that she never had any Gowns or other Cloaths bought her since her Intermarriage of any Value except the Single Silk Gown Articulate.³

Catherine had been trying to obtain a legal separation from her husband since she first brought the case in front of the Durham Consistory Court in 1765, and in her original allegations had claimed that he had 'only Bought her one Silk Gown' in all the thirteen years of their marriage. He, for his part, argued that he had 'bought her many other gowns her Superiors would think very handsome ones.'⁴ The case dragged on for another two years, moving to the York Consistory Court in 1767 on William's appeal; and so, Catherine found herself challenging her husband's allegations against her clothing.

Here we have three different women, and three different sources which all deal with their clothing in some way. Tennyson described her clothing in order to plan its distribution after her death, considering her wardrobe as a whole in order to make decisions about who she would bequeath it to. In contrast, the only descriptive traces we have of the wardrobe of Dorothy Fallowfield were left by someone else; reliant on the parish to provide for her in times of hardship, her clothing appears in the Overseers' Accounts of money disbursed to and for parish paupers. Finally, Catherine Ettrick was forced by exceptional circumstances to describe her clothing in a legal document, which was presented to York Consistory Court in order to counter specific allegations made against her. Her husband also described her clothing for the court, but in a very different way. These three cases therefore raise a number of issues: where was women's

³ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, CP.I.1503, Ettrick v. Ettrick, The Personal Answers of Catherine Ettrick, 1767.

⁴ BOR, Cause Papers, TRANS.CP.1765/4, Ettrick v. Ettrick, Transcription of original cause, 1765.

clothing described, and by whom? How was it being described? And why? These are the questions which lie at the heart of this thesis.

They are not entirely new questions, and scholars have already attempted to tackle some of them, focusing largely on the where and the why.⁵ One of the key answers which has emerged from the scholarship on consumption is that women used their clothing, as well as descriptions of it, to engage in form of feminine sentimental consumption. This argument has its origins in the 1990s, but has remained virtually unchallenged (and oft repeated). Clothing, perhaps more so than any other possession, has been understood as an emotionally charged commodity for women. Early studies of women's consumption argued that women described their clothing in the pages of their letters, diaries, and wills in order to express some sort of emotional meaning, which is betrayed in these 'careful' or 'meticulous' descriptions. I argue that these assumptions are long overdue revision, but this does not simply mean making similar arguments on the part of men. In this thesis, I offer a reassessment of the scholarship, looking at the description and use of women's clothing in eighteenth-century England in order to make an original contribution to the study of women and consumption, as well as decisive interventions in the methodologies used for the study of it.

The thesis is structured in two thematic halves, which are both made up of two chapters. The first half tackles questions of where women's clothing was described and by whom, as well as how it was described. In chapters one and two, I draw out a shared language of description across three sources – wills, newspaper advertisements, and account books. Scholars have written about the description of clothing in these sources as careful, meticulous, and even

⁵ For example, see Maxine Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England,' *Journal of Social History*, 30:2 (1996): 415-34; Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-44.

unnecessary; however, I argue that these descriptions deployed a readily available and widely understood language, which could be used by almost anyone to describe women's clothing. Indeed, in these sources we do not just find women describing their own clothing, but family members, merchants, milliners, and even strangers doing so as well. I also demonstrate in these two chapters that descriptions of clothing have been isolated and identified as evidence of emotion across these three sources. By conducting a detailed analysis, however, I argue that the description of clothing in these sources cannot be interpreted in this way. Moreover, I outline a number of methodological issues in the approaches previously taken by scholars. This has important implications for arguments in the scholarship about the 'emotional' or 'sentimental' consumption of women, as I demonstrate that the evidence previously deployed in support of this is not there; descriptions of clothing cannot offer glimpses of any 'real' or 'authentic' emotion. In the conclusion to the first half of this thesis, I therefore argue that the scholarship on women and consumption needs to revise its approach to emotion in light of more recent scholarship on the history of emotions.

The second half of the thesis is structured loosely around the theme of use, and turns to suggest some more productive approaches to thinking about description, as well as women and their clothing more generally. In chapters three and four, I respond to arguments in the scholarship that we need to focus more on things in use; however, I argue that we also need to explore how and why clothing was being used in different sources. Though there has already been a focus on trials for theft, in these two chapters I suggest that scholars of consumption should turn their attention to new kinds of court records. I therefore offer a detailed analysis of one suit for separation in chapter three, and a discussion of infanticide trials and a trial for murder in chapter four. We will never be able to tell from these sources whether the things they describe really existed, as clothing in this context is an ambiguous blend of the real, the imagined, and the rhetorical; nevertheless, I argue that this is not a limitation.

Rather, my analysis in these chapters demonstrates that the use of women's clothing in these sources sheds light on wider understandings of its role. By moving beyond a focus on description in isolation, I argue that the description of clothing could be used as a powerful rhetorical tool in different contexts.

I make a clear contribution in this thesis to the scholarship on consumption, as I offer a revision of existing methodologies and suggest some new ways forward for the study of women and their clothing. I therefore offer a detailed overview of the scholarship on consumption in this introduction, in order to situate my arguments in this context. This overview includes a discussion of the recent turn to the study of objects and emotion, and I draw here on the emerging field of the history of emotions. I also engage throughout the thesis with a number of different historiographies, and most notably with the scholarship on the female life cycle; I contribute to this by taking an approach which looks at women from across different stages in the life cycle. I draw most explicitly on this scholarship in chapter four, but questions about the life cycle run through all of the chapters. I also consider the impact of economic circumstance on the life cycle throughout. In addition, I have drawn on a range of historiographies in individual chapters; for example, I offer an overview of the scholarship on marital violence and breakdown in chapter three, and situate my analysis of childbed linen in chapter four in a wider discussion about infanticide. Indeed, I demonstrate in these chapters some of the benefits of drawing these historiographies together with the scholarship on consumption. Finally, as I make deliberate methodological interventions in this thesis, I offer a detailed overview of the sources used in each chapter.

Consumption, Identity, and Emotion in Eighteenth-century England

‘There was a consumer revolution in eighteenth-century England,’ stated Neil McKendrick baldly in 1982; in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, he argued for a dramatic change in the way in which people acquired the new consumer goods which came to characterise the period, as ‘objects which for centuries had been the privileged possessions of the rich’ became ‘the legitimate aspirations’ of almost all of society.⁶ McKendrick explained this in terms of ‘class competition and emulative spending,’ which, he argued, was accompanied by a commercialisation of fashion that fuelled this new consumer society:

What men and women had once hoped to inherit from their parents, they now expected to buy for themselves. What were once bought at the dictate of need, were now bought at the dictate of fashion. What were once bought for life, might now be bought several times over.⁷

Though Joan Thirsk first spoke of an early modern ‘consumer society’ in 1978, it is McKendrick’s claims which have been most thoroughly debated over the past thirty-five years, and there can be no doubt of the influence that they have had – and that they continue to hold – over the study of consumption, consumer goods, and consumer behaviour in the eighteenth century.⁸ Love them or loathe them (and many later studies belong firmly in the latter camp), in responding to McKendrick’s arguments scholars set the questions which have continued to dominate the study of consumption in this period; was there a ‘consumer

⁶ Neil McKendrick, ‘Introduction. The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England’ in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1982), 1-5.

⁷ Neil McKendrick, ‘The Commercialization of Fashion,’ in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, 96; McKendrick, ‘Introduction,’ 1.

⁸ Thirsk identifies its roots in the first half of the sixteenth century, ‘when a deliberate policy decision was taken to encourage consumer industries.’

Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 23, 179.

revolution' in the eighteenth century? Was it unique to the eighteenth century? How wide was its reach? Who took part? How did they take part, and why? Just two years after *The Birth of a Consumer Society* was published, for example, Margaret Spufford traced the origins of McKendrick's 'consumer revolution' back to the seventeenth century by looking at the activities of petty chapmen who, she argues, enabled a 'minor revolution in domestic comfort' amongst the labouring classes.⁹ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Beverly Lemire opened up the idea of a 'consumer revolution' to include theft and the second-hand clothing trade, arguing that these acquisitive processes reflected consumerism operating at a wider social level, allowing a broad section of the population to 'wear clothes above their rank and beyond their means had the garments been new.'¹⁰

As well as charting earlier origins or widening its reach, attempts have also been made to demonstrate that McKendrick's 'consumer revolution' was neither as dramatic nor as revolutionary as he had originally claimed. Looking at the mid-sixteenth to late eighteenth centuries, for example, Carole Shammas has argued that though there were 'changes, variations, and trends' in consumption, no 'Origins of the Market' or 'Great Transformations in Consumer Consciousness emerged.'¹¹ And, Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths have suggested that any eighteenth-century 'consumer revolution' needs to be understood in light of

⁹ Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), 4, 145-46.

¹⁰ Beverly Lemire, 'Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes,' *Journal of British Studies*, 27:1 (1988): 4; Beverly Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 24:2 (1990): 255-76.

¹¹ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 294.

See also Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England*, 145-46.

changes which took place before 1650.¹² Indeed, John Styles has criticised the term ‘consumer society’ and its status as a ‘holy grail’ for scholars of eighteenth-century consumer behaviour, arguing that too much emphasis has been placed on too few a number of ‘spectacular, but exceptional’ examples; looking at the supply of non-elite clothing in the north of England, for example, he shows that there was little sign of the ready-made garment industry on which so much emphasis for the commercialisation of fashion had been placed.¹³ Similarly, in 2004 Mark Overton et al argued that there was no ‘decisive turning point’ or ‘unmistakeable breakthrough’ which heralded the arrival of a ‘new order of consumption’ in the period 1600 to 1750, though they identified an increasingly ‘richer and more varied material culture’ in their case study of Kent.¹⁴ The idea of a ‘consumer revolution,’ however, has remained an enduring – and alluring – concept, and for every study which has attempted to nuance or problematise it, there are those which take it as a given (though they have declined in number in recent years).¹⁵ Nevertheless, there does remain widespread consensus amongst scholars of the eighteenth century that there *was*, if not a ‘consumer revolution,’ then an expanding world of goods to which more and more people had access, be it through first or second-hand purchase, theft, inheritance, gifting, or

¹² Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household: The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 240.

¹³ John Styles, ‘Clothing the North: The Supply of Non-elite Clothing in the Eighteenth-Century North of England’, *Textile History*, 25:2 (1994): 140, 160.

¹⁴ Mark Overton et al, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 175-77.

¹⁵ For example, see Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, ‘Introduction’ in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2; John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & design in early modern Britain & early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 143-44; Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2; Margot Finn, ‘Men’s Things: Masculine Possession in the Consumer Revolution,’ *Social History*, 25:2 (2000): 135-55.

charity.¹⁶ This is the approach I take in this thesis, as I identify a clear link between this expanding world of goods and an increase in description across sources.

In contrast to his 'consumer revolution' thesis, McKendrick's claim that changing consumer behaviour in the eighteenth century could be explained by emulation and competitive spending has been much more widely and effectively discredited in the years since the publication of *The Birth of a Consumer Society*. The challenge began in earnest in the early 1990s and continues to this day.¹⁷ In 1991, Lorna Weatherill argued that it was 'naïve' to assume, as McKendrick had, that 'servant girls who wore silk dresses handed to them by their mistresses...were really trying to be taken for members of a different part of society,' later writing that the 'emulation model' was limited in granting only one social function to the ownership of goods.¹⁸ In 1993, the edited collection *Consumption and the World of Goods* marked a turning point in the historiography, offering a series of interdisciplinary essays exploring the history of consumption and its relationship to culture and everyday life.¹⁹ In her

¹⁶ John Styles and Amanda Vickery, 'Introduction' in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 1; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

¹⁷ For an example of a recent challenge to the theory of emulation see Evelyn Welch and Juliet Claxton, 'Easy Innovation in Early Modern Europe' in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Evelyn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 88-109.

¹⁸ Lorna Weatherill, 'Consumer Behaviour, Textiles and Dress in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,' *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991): 207; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain, 1660-1760. Second edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁹ John Brewer and Roy Porter, ed., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

This was followed by two further volumes in 1995: Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, ed., *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997)

contribution to that volume, Amanda Vickery looked at the diaries of Elizabeth Shackleton in order to argue that, although 'social emulation and conspicuous consumption' could be 'useful' concepts, they were 'dangerously misleading' as 'portmanteau descriptions of eighteenth-century consumer behaviour.' Vickery later expanded on this thesis in *The Gentleman's Daughter*.²⁰ In 1996, Maxine Berg echoed Vickery's conclusions by arguing that, for middling women in the industrialising towns of Birmingham and Sheffield, consumption was not 'tied to social emulation and fashion.'²¹

While Vickery looked at the minor gentry and Berg at the middling classes, Hannah Greig has assumed the mantle on behalf of the elite, arguing that despite the 'seductive' narrative of fashion as a 'democratizing force challenging traditional social hierarchies,' the *beau monde* continued to use dress to construct an exclusive identity through 'insider knowledge and accessories'; entry to this club could not simply be purchased by way of emulation.²² Jon Stobart has similarly pointed to the continued presence of older goods alongside new ones in country houses, showing that the consumption of the elite was not just about acquisitive spending; older things, he suggests, 'were often important carriers of family associations.'²³ These studies have argued, then, that

[1995]]; John Brewer and Susan Staves, ed., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

²⁰ Amanda Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods: a Lancashire consumer and her possessions, 1751-81' in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 294; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999 [1998]).

²¹ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 428.

²² Hannah Greig, 'Leading the Fashion: The Material Culture of London's Beau Monde' in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 301-308; Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²³ Jon Stobart, 'The country house and cultures of consumption' in *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption*, ed. Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (Swindon: Historic England, 2016), 1-5.

consumption for the middling and elite classes was not just about the new and novel, and did not just reflect a desire to move up the social hierarchy (although, as in the case of the *beau monde*, it *could* act as an indication of social status). Indeed, Helen Berry has recently even urged us to shift our focus to the ‘pleasures of austerity’ and look at those who ‘withdrew from the emerging culture of consumption,’ in order to paint a more balanced picture of the period.²⁴

The labouring classes, so often the targets of the contemporary criticism on which much of McKendrick’s argument was based, have also been the subject of a number of studies which argue that emulative spending cannot sufficiently account for their consumption in this period. The majority of these works have focused on clothing, as possessions available to all but the most destitute. Scholars have looked at the clothing available to the labouring classes and how they were able to acquire it, and have attempted to tackle assumptions that plebeian consumption – in contrast to that of the middling or elite – was simply about necessity and functionality, and that it involved little choice.²⁵ For

See also Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, ‘Fashion, Heritage and Family,’ *Cultural and Social History*, 11:3 (2014): 386.

²⁴ Helen Berry, ‘The Pleasures of Austerity,’ *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37:2 (2014): 274.

²⁵ For examples of clothing acquired from the parish see Steven King, ‘Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840,’ *Textile History*, 33:1 (2002): 37-47; Peter Jones ‘Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England,’ *Textile History*, 37:1 (2006): 17-37; Vivienne Richmond, “Indiscriminate liberality subverts the Morals and depraves the habits of the Poor”: A Contribution to the Debate on the Poor Law, Parish Clothing Relief and Clothing Societies in Early Nineteenth-Century England,’ *Textile History*, 40:1 (2009): 51-69.

For examples of the second-hand trade see Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, ‘Introduction: Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade: Themes, Topics and Debates’ in *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade: European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700-1900*, ed. Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Miles Lambert, “Cast-off Wearing Apparel”: The consumption and distribution of second-hand clothing in northern England during the long eighteenth century,’ *Textile History*, 31:1 (2004): 1-26.

example, although in 1991 *Fashion's Favourite* appeared to endorse McKendrick's thesis by arguing that the growth of the cotton industry and a concomitant rise in popular fashion had 'blurr[ed] social differentiation,' Beverly Lemire's later works have explicitly refuted a model of social emulation whilst emphasising the availability of fashionable clothing to a wide range of the population. 'A narrowly defined spirit of emulation,' she wrote in 1997, 'cannot account for the powerfully expressed desire for certain goods.'²⁶ It is John Styles, however, who perhaps has done the most to address – and thoroughly dispute – McKendrick's claims in the context of plebeian consumption. In a series of chapters and articles, and culminating in the magisterial *The Dress of the People* in 2007, he has argued that – although adult plebeians in eighteenth-century England were often 'involuntary consumers' – they *could* expect to indulge in the 'pleasures of stylish clothing' at some point during their lifetimes. However, he emphasises the continuing influence of the customary religious and festive calendar, as well as the labouring family life cycle, on this consumption of

For examples of gifting and bequests see Dolly MacKinnon, "Charity is worth it when it looks that good": Rural Women and Bequests of Clothing in Early Modern England' in *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephanie Tarbin and Susan Broomhall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

See also Danae Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings": The Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-Century Sussex,' *Textile History*, 43:1 (2012): 5-22; Angela McShane and Clare Backhouse, 'Top Knots and Lower Sorts: Print and Promiscuous Consumption in the 1690s' in *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Michael Hunter (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 337, 351.

²⁶ Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 200.

For endorsement of McKendrick's model of emulative spending, see also Beverly Lemire, "A Good Stock of Cloaths": The Changing Market for Cotton Clothing in Britain, 1750-1800,' *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991): 311-328.

For a rejection of the model of emulative spending, see Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the factory, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 123; Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c. 1600-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 86.

clothing.²⁷ Roundly rejecting a 'trickle down' theory of emulation, he writes that 'as new fashions moved through the social hierarchy they changed...made from different materials, they joined different assemblages of clothes, and, most importantly, they were worn in different circumstances, acquiring different meanings in the process.'²⁸

This thorough rejection of a 'trickle down' theory from across the social hierarchy, however, left scholars with a conundrum; if consumption in eighteenth-century England was not about emulation, then what *was* it about? More importantly, what did it mean to the consumers themselves? Much work of the past twenty-five years or so has devoted its energies to addressing these questions, and the response has largely been to argue that people used consumer goods and practices of consumption to craft, shape, and communicate gender and status identities.²⁹ Amanda Vickery, for example, has argued that although Elizabeth Shackleton used her possessions to display her social status to the wider public, she also performed a gendered identity through 'a more self-conscious, emotional investment' in things.³⁰ Maxine Berg has made a similar point in the context of the middling classes, again arguing for a particularly feminine emotional engagement in and through clothing and

²⁷ Styles, 'Clothing the North,' 139-66; John Styles, 'Involuntary consumers? Servants and their Clothes in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Textile History*, 33:1 (2002): 9-21; John Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England' in *Luxury in the eighteenth century: Debates, desires and delectable goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 107-13; Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 1, 232-38.

²⁸ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 324.

²⁹ Sara Pennell offered a useful overview of the state of the field in 1999, as did Jonathan White in 2006.

Sara Pennell, 'Consumption and Consumerism in Early Modern England,' *The Historical Journal*, 42:2 (1999): 549-64; Jonathan White, 'A World of Goods? The "Consumption Turn" and Eighteenth-Century British History,' *Cultural and Social History*, 3:1 (2006): 93-104.

³⁰ Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods,' 292-94

household goods.³¹ Though studies have focused on a range of consumer goods, clothing, as we shall see, has been understood to be a particularly fertile site for the creation and performance of identity; in the context of the labouring classes, it has been assumed that clothing enabled an expression of identity, or of the 'self' in much the same way as Berg and Vickery argued for those further up the social hierarchy.³² Most recently, studies have begun to look not only at gender and status identity, but to the life cycle and its impact; John Styles, for example, has been successful in demonstrating the importance of the plebeian life cycle on the consumption of clothing, while in 2013 Amanda Vickery attempted to 'bring together the historiography on aging with that on gender and consumerism' by looking at fashionable consumption in old age.³³ I take a similar approach in this thesis, as I consider the impact of the female life cycle on the consumption of clothing.

So pervasive has this focus on identity been, however, that in *The Dress of the People* John Styles proposed a shift away from the 'issues of meaning and identity which have often engaged those who study dress' in order to grant more attention to exploring how clothing was 'embedded in the practices of everyday life.'³⁴ Frank Trentmann has been more critical, arguing that most scholars of

³¹ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 415-434.

³² For example, see Danae Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked": Attitudes to the Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Rural History*, 26:1 (2015): 17-33; Steven King and Christiana Payne, 'The Dress of the Poor,' *Textile History*, 33:1 (2002): 1-8.

³³ Styles, 'Custom or Consumption?' 107-113; Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 1, 232-28; Amanda Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England,' *Journal of British Studies*, 52:4 (2013): 858-86.

³⁴ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 323.

Most recently, attention has turned to understanding the impact of fashion, as well as how it functioned in the early modern world in the edited collection *Fashioning the Early Modern*. For examples, see Evelyn Welch, 'Introduction' and John Styles, 'Fashion and Innovation in Early Modern Europe' in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Evelyn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 12.

eighteenth-century material culture ‘have tended to take as given what material culture is and how to study it.’ They remain, he wrote, preoccupied with ‘discussions of possessions and heirlooms in the construction of social, gender, and family identities.’³⁵ Things, in other words, are simply a means to an end – they are interesting only because they ‘promise to reveal processes of social stratification and identity formation.’³⁶ Why has this been the case? It is partly a result of the questions of meaning and identity with which scholars have been so obsessed over the past three decades, but it is also, as Trentmann argues, because the material world has largely been understood to concern the “soft,” decorative, and visible.’ Domestic objects and personal possessions dominate the pages of eighteenth-century consumer studies, which have rarely turned their attention ‘to urban networks, to the office, or to the brutal materiality of iron, steel, or bullets.’³⁷

Clothing, perhaps more so than any other possession, has been understood to be a particularly potent tool for the construction and communication of identity – it is both ubiquitous and visible, as well as personal and public. ‘Owing to its intimate relationship with its wearers,’ Susan Vincent argues, ‘dress is an especially privileged site for exploring this performance of identity.’³⁸ There exist, then, two interrelated assumptions which have profoundly shaped the study of dress in this period; the first is that gender, status, and family identity is

³⁵ Frank Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 48:2 (2009): 284-85; Frank Trentmann, ‘Introduction’ in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4, 8.

³⁶ Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History,’ 288.

³⁷ Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History,’ 287.

³⁸ Susan Vincent, ‘Men’s Hair: Managing Appearances in the Long Eighteenth Century’ in *Gender and Material Culture in Britain since 1600*, ed. Hannah Greig, Jane Hamlett and Leonie Hannan (London: Palgrave, 2016), 64.

For an in-depth discussion of the role of clothing in crafting and presenting identity, see Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

crafted and performed through consumption, and the second is that clothing is powerfully placed to express this. As far back as 1997, Colin Campbell offered a critical examination of this ‘consumption as communication thesis,’ reaching the conclusion that ‘the belief that people’s clothes can be “read” for the intended “messages” they contain will probably persist as long as no attempt is made to falsify it. Like most dubious beliefs it is not abandoned simply because it is rarely if ever put to the test.’³⁹ Anthropologist Daniel Miller has been similarly sceptical, writing that an obsession with treating clothing as ‘a kind of pseudo-language’ of signs and symbols which represent identity has become ‘as much a limitation as an asset.’⁴⁰ It is therefore likely that clothing was not as easily ‘read’ by contemporaries – or, indeed, by historians – as we might like to think. Nevertheless, in chapters three and four I demonstrate that clothing *could* play a significant role in the performance of gender and status roles; in chapter three, for example, whether Catherine Ettrick was appropriately dressed for her husband’s station became a key concern in her suit for separation. I therefore argue that clothing was a tool which could be used to support certain narratives, as well as perform gendered relationships. This was not necessarily linked to any desire to advertise or disguise an ‘inner self,’ but rather appealed to popular understandings of clothing for specific purposes.⁴¹ Ubiquitous and available across the social hierarchy, clothing was the most available possession with which to do this.

If clothing and the ‘soft’ material world has been understood to unlock the key to understanding identity in the eighteenth century, it has also been

³⁹ Colin Campbell, ‘When the meaning is not a message: A critique of the consumption as communication thesis’ in *Buy this Book: Studies in advertising and consumption*, ed. Mica Nava et al (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 349; Colin Campbell, ‘The Modern Western Fashion Pattern, its Functions and Relationship to Identity’ in *Identities Through Fashion: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Ana Marta González and Laura Bovone (Oxford: Berg, 2012), 14.

⁴⁰ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 12.

⁴¹ Miller, *Stuff*, 13.

overwhelmingly associated with the feminine sphere, perhaps partly because it was women who most often received the ire of contemporary commentators critical of excessive and indecent consumption. In 2000 Margot Finn argued that previous scholarship had ‘tended to promote the assumption that the “sex of things” is predominantly female, that the history of gender and consumption in the modern period is primarily a history of women’s experiences.’ Men, she contended, were also significant participators in the market through ‘gifts and purchases of buttons, pheasants, teapots and clocks.’⁴² Nevertheless, despite attempts to reintegrate men into our understanding of the consumer behaviour in the eighteenth century, the association of consumption – and the consumption of clothing in particular – with the feminine persists.⁴³ Here, then, we come back to the argument that it was a highly ‘emotionally’ and ‘sentimentally’ charged commodity for women. Although scholarship has only recently explicitly begun to address the relationship between consumption and emotion, this has its origins as far back as the 1990s. As we have seen, in this decade Amanda Vickery and Maxine Berg both put forward the argument that women attached ‘emotional significance to their possessions’ in a way that men did not, and, in the seminal *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, Vickery described the ‘sentimental materialism’ of the Lancashire gentlewoman Elizabeth Shackleton as evidenced in her diaries and letters.⁴⁴ Though Vickery herself warned of the limitations of this example, emphasising that she was not arguing ‘that every

⁴² Finn, ‘Men’s Things,’ 133-34, 153.

⁴³ Finn, ‘Men’s Things,’ 133-34, 153; Miles Lambert, ‘Death and Memory: Clothing Bequests in English Wills 1650-1830,’ *Costume*, 48:1 (2014): 46-59; Miles Lambert, ‘Small Presents Confirm Friendship: The “Gifting” of Clothing and Textiles in England from the Late Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries,’ *Text: For the Study of Textile Art Design & History*, 32 (2004-5): 24-32; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and domestic authority in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ Vickery, ‘Women and the world of goods,’ 292-94; Berg, ‘Women’s Consumption and the Industrial Classes,’ 415-434.

See also: Maxine Berg, ‘Consumption in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain’ in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialisation*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 381-82.

woman's relationship with material culture was the same,' Elizabeth Shackleton has continued to be rolled out as a byword for women's emotional attachments to their possessions ever since; one cannot, therefore, overstate the lasting legacy of Vickery's work.⁴⁵ Berg's 1996 study of women's wills has been similarly influential. She interpreted the process of bequeathing clothing – and in particular the act of describing it – as evidence of 'emotional' attachments both to people and to things, a claim which has oft been repeated since it was first put forward.⁴⁶ In 1997, Marcia Pointon similarly argued that bequests left to other women functioned 'both as a permanent legal record and as a declaration of sentimental attachment.'⁴⁷

The conclusions of Berg, Vickery, et al stem partly from the argument that most women, unlike their male counterparts, 'only had moveable goods' to bequeath to their descendants, but they are also, I suggest, a result of the quest to attach a meaning beyond emulation to consumer behaviour.⁴⁸ They reflect an attempt to prove that, contrary to contemporary claims of excessive, selfish, and competitive consumption, eighteenth-century women were in fact thoughtful, economic, and sentimental consumers. Moreover, these arguments grant women a specific kind of feminine agency in the face of patriarchal restriction on

⁴⁵ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 191-93.

Some of the studies which cite Elizabeth Shackleton in this way are Ariane Fennetaux, 'Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century,' *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, 20:3 (2008): 330-31; Lambert, 'Small Presents Confirm Friendship,' 28; Joanne Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed? Married women, property and 'coverture' in England 1660-1800,' *Continuity and Change*, 17:3 (2002): 354.

⁴⁶ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 415-34.

For example, this argument is repeated in Ariane Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics: Recycling Textiles in Eighteenth-Century Britain' in *The Afterlife of Used Things: Recycling in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ariane Fennetaux, Amélie Junqua, and Sophie Vasset (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 134-35; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

⁴⁷ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40.

⁴⁸ Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods,' 294.

their consumption. Though it is now acknowledged that the law could operate more flexibly in practice, under 'coverture' a wife could not make economic contracts in her own right and her husband also gained possession of all her moveable goods.⁴⁹ Though the so called 'law of necessities' did enable wives to purchase 'necessaries,' what constituted a necessary item was directly defined by the status of their husband.⁵⁰ However, by arguing for a specific form of sentimental consumption, this early scholarship allowed women their own kind of power within a system stacked against them.

There can be no doubt of the influence that these early studies have had – and continue to have – on the scholarship, as they paved the way for a better understanding of women's lives, and established the study of women and their things as an important field in its own right.⁵¹ My own research owes a great debt to this. Nevertheless, one of my key arguments in this thesis is that the assumption that clothing was inherently emotionally charged for women needs to be challenged; not only are the terms used by scholars to describe women's engagement with things decidedly woolly and ill defined – 'emotional' engagements, 'sentimental' attachments, 'personal meaning' – but I argue the evidence used to support these claims is inadequate. Although only in its infancy, the recent turn to the emotional in material culture scholarship has shown little signs of change. While an edited collection of essays first set out to explore the relationship between objects, memory, and evocation in 1999, the

⁴⁹ Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 352.

See also Margot Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England, c. 1760-1860,' *The Historical Journal*, 39:3 (1996): 707.

⁵⁰ Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England,' 709-10; Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 358.

⁵¹ Beverly Lemire, 'Draping the body and dressing the home: The material culture of textiles and clothes in the Atlantic world, c. 1500-1800' in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 85; Batchelor and Kaplan, 'Introduction,' 3.

study of objects and emotions has only really gained traction within the last ten years.⁵² In 2010, for example, Jo Labanyi urged scholars to find ways of thinking about emotion and materiality which moved beyond representation.⁵³ In 2014, a collection of autobiographical essays titled *Evocative Objects* attempted a ‘detailed examination of particular objects with rich connections to daily life as well as intellectual practice,’ and in that same year *Love Objects* offered a number of essays which embedded their discussion of objects in different cultural and historical frameworks.⁵⁴ And, in 2016 a series of articles in a special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of History* sought to ‘expand the existing research field’ by focusing on objects as sources for the history of emotions.⁵⁵

This is by no means to suggest that exploring emotion through the study of things does not offer a promising approach, and the most successful studies to date have been those which explore the role of objects in constructing, performing, and expressing emotion. Angela McShane, for example, has described ‘an affective economy of loyalty, embodied in cheap and accessible political commodities, namely decorative objects made of clay, metals, and paper’ in seventeenth-century England, arguing that these things appealed to a widely shared material vocabulary ‘predicated upon customary and fashionable

⁵² Marius Kwint, ‘Introduction: The Physical Past’ in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 3-4.

⁵³ Jo Labanyi, ‘Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality,’ *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 11:3-4 (2010): 223-33.

⁵⁴ Sherry Turkle, ‘Introduction: The Things That Matter’ in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, ed. Sherry Turkle (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 5-7; Victor Margolin, ‘Introduction: How Do I Love Thee? Objects of Endearment in Contemporary Culture’ in *Love Objects: Emotion, Design and Material Culture*, ed. Anna Morgan and Sorcha O’Brien (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

⁵⁵ Jacqueline Van Gent and Raisa Maria Toivo, ‘Introduction,’ *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 41:3 (2016): 264.

practices.’⁵⁶ McShane compares these cheap and accessible political objects to contemporary courtship gifts, which Sally Holloway has also examined in detail. Using object analysis alongside textual sources, Holloway explores ‘emotional performances’ in love letters, diaries, and gifts like ribbons and embroidered textiles in order to argue that these things ‘determined how people related to one another by providing a key means of conceptualising and processing their emotions.’⁵⁷ And, looking at the relationship between objects and emotion in the context of the Foundling Hospital textile tokens, John Styles has argued that these objects enabled illiterate mothers to express ‘the most tender human feelings.’ However, he questions the insight these tokens grant into any real or ‘authentic’ emotion: do they tell us about the emotions experienced by poor mothers forced to give up their children, he asks, or do they tell us how these women thought the Hospital would expect them to feel?⁵⁸ All three scholars emphasise that the use of these objects to perform or express emotion deliberately appealed to a knowledge – a ‘material vocabulary’ or ‘material literacy’ – which was widely recognised and understood. Styles, for instance, writes that this was a world in which ‘verbal literacy existed in conjunction with a kind of material literacy,’ where ‘the use of certain objects to mark events, express allegiances and forge relationships was familiar and the meaning of those objects widely shared.’⁵⁹ This is where objects can add to our

⁵⁶ Angela McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects: Material Expressions of Love and Loyalty in Seventeenth-Century England,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 48:4 (2009): 873-875.

⁵⁷ McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects,’ 873-875; Sally Holloway, ‘Romantic Love in Words and Objects during Courtship and Adultery c. 1730 to 1830’ (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013), 22, 53.

⁵⁸ John Styles, ‘Objects of Emotion: The London Foundling Hospital Tokens, 1741-60’ in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 167-68; John Styles, *Threads of Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital’s Textile Tokens, 1740-1770* (London: The Foundling Museum, 2013 [2010]).

⁵⁹ Styles, *Threads of Feeling*, 70; McShane, ‘Subjects and Objects,’ 874; Holloway, ‘Romantic Love in Words and Objects,’ 22.

understanding of emotion in a way that texts cannot, giving access to a material literacy which was widely understood.

Most recently, the edited volume *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* offered the most comprehensive study of the relationship between objects and emotion to date, focusing on European objects from the Middle ages to the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ Though they focus on a range of different objects, the essays in this volume all share a key aim: to demonstrate 'that closer attention to the affective importance of material culture in the past enhances our understanding of the history of emotions, and, at the same time, that considering emotions enhances our understanding of historical material culture.'⁶¹ All also agree on the need to historicise both objects and emotions, following a growing number of studies in the history of emotions. Thus, for example, Sally Holloway offers a discussion of 'the powerful role played by women's creation, selection, and embroidering of textiles during rituals surrounding the birth and renunciation of infants,' drawing on evidence from the Foundling Hospital textile tokens.⁶² In addition to offering the first study explicitly dedicated to the relationship between objects and emotions, *Feeling Things* offers a productive line of thinking, arguing that 'placing objects at the centre of the emotional experience' allows a different perspective to that which assumes that the relationship between people and things is not a 'two-way' one. Instead, the editors suggest, we should think of objects as mediators in

⁶⁰ Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, 'Introduction' in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

⁶¹ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, 'Introduction,' 2.

⁶² Sally Holloway, 'Materializing Maternal Emotions: Birth, Celebration, and Renunciation in England, c. 1688-1830' in *Feeling Things*, 158-71.

emotional transactions between humans.’⁶³ In other words, the essays in the volume explore how ‘objects are often the things people do emotions *with*.’⁶⁴

Nevertheless, though studies like *Feeling Things* are offering productive ways forward for exploring *how* the people of the past used objects to ‘do’ emotion, the lure of the inherently ‘emotional’ textile remains strong.⁶⁵ In a recent introduction for the ‘Emotional Textiles’ special issue of *Textile: Cloth and Culture*, Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway write that ‘Textiles are often highly emotional for their makers and owners.’⁶⁶ This interest in objects and emotions has been preceded – and influenced – by a ‘material turn’ in the scholarship on consumption, and there remains an assumption that surviving textiles can somehow enable us to access emotions in a way that textual sources cannot. ‘Do textiles possess greater emotional potency than other materials,’ ask Dolan and Holloway, ‘or are textile researchers more attuned to emotional meanings within their work?’⁶⁷ They decide upon the former, it seems, arguing that textiles are ‘important vehicles for emotionally charged memories.’⁶⁸ This is partly because textiles and clothing can bear the imprints of the bodies of the past. However, it also stems largely from the fact that the domestic production and decoration of textiles was women’s work. Dolan and Holloway write that the ‘investment of time’ by women ‘was key in imbuing emotional meaning that could be gauged by

⁶³ Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, ‘A Feeling for Things, Past and Present’ in *Feeling Things*, 9.

⁶⁴ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, ‘A Feeling for Things, Past and Present,’ 9.

⁶⁵ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, ‘A Feeling for Things, Past and Present,’ 9.

⁶⁶ Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway, ‘Emotional Textiles: An Introduction,’ *Textile: Cloth and Culture*, 14:2 (2016): 155; Sally Holloway, ‘Textiles’ in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 161.

⁶⁷ Dolan and Holloway, ‘Emotional Textiles,’ 154.

⁶⁸ Dolan and Holloway, ‘Emotional Textiles,’ 154.

a relation or friend' or a 'museum visitor hundreds of years later,' and Ulinka Rublack writes that embroidery was 'a woman's labour of love.'⁶⁹

There are two important points to be made here; the first is that emotion is often understood to rest in the textile itself, the time spent on its making investing it with an emotional meaning which can still be read hundreds of years later. Even in otherwise nuanced studies of textiles and emotion, the temptation to invest the thing itself with feeling is strong. In her study of courtship gifts, for instance, Sally Holloway writes that handmade gifts 'personified the spirit of the giver' and 'had a woman's love embroidered in their very fabric.'⁷⁰ And, in her discussion of the Foundling textile tokens she writes that these objects 'are imbued with a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, expectation, faith, joy, love, and sorrow.'⁷¹ John Styles similarly writes of the Foundling tokens that 'the most direct expressions of raw material emotions' are to be found in tokens which use the heart, 'the established symbol of love in the eighteenth century.'⁷² It is important to note that this scholarship focuses largely on textile gifts made in the home, rather than things made by tailors, seamstresses, or mantuamakers. Contractual purchases of clothing are not seen to possess the same emotional potency as gifts. Moreover, the focus of these studies is on the pre-industrial; the editors of *Feeling Things*, for instance, write that the volume stops in the eighteenth century as the relationship between people and objects 'changed when items were no longer made by hand...and the goods themselves became both less durable and cheaper.'⁷³ This prompts a number of questions about the relationship between people and their things in the post-industrial

⁶⁹ Dolan and Holloway, 'Emotional Textiles,' 155; Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 236-37.

See also Holloway, 'Textiles,' 161.

⁷⁰ Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects,' 70.

⁷¹ Holloway, 'Materializing Maternal Emotions,' 158-71.

⁷² Styles, *Threads of Feeling*, 64-65.

⁷³ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, 'Introduction,' 2.

world, as it is overwhelmingly 'handmade' items which scholars have interpreted as objects of emotion.

The second point here is that the same narrative of sentimental consumption has been carried over to the study of objects, which have not been used to nuance or problematise this reading of textual sources. Rather, surviving clothing and textiles are instead seen to confirm what we supposedly know already – that women were intensely emotional about their things. These objects are thought to be straightforwardly about sentiment or love, or to have an 'emotional meaning' which was easily understood and shared by both maker and recipient (and can be still be read by us today). Looking at modern-day knitting, Jo Turney has been critical of this, arguing that the assumption that knitted gifts are 'emotionally charged' with a 'sentimental exchange value' is problematic; she points out that, as well as 'expressing normative cultural assumptions surrounding knitted objects,' these things also demonstrate that there is an ambiguous 'distance between intent and reception' which cannot be easily read.⁷⁴ This surely becomes even more difficult (and even impossible) for objects gifted and received hundreds of years ago. This is why this thesis focuses on textual sources, as I demonstrate that, in addition to turning to the material, scholars also need to continue to test our assumptions about emotions and text.

These assumptions are also problematic in terms of the growing body of scholarship which deals with the history of emotions. Though it has its origins as far back as the 1940s, this discrete subdiscipline only really came into its own *after* arguments about women's sentimental engagement with their possessions were already well entrenched in the scholarship on consumption.⁷⁵ This is

⁷⁴ Jo Turney, 'Making Love with Needles: Knitted Objects as Signs of Love?' *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 10:3 (2012): 305, 310.

⁷⁵ Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

significant, as this scholarship on emotion has since shown that emotions are not universal across time periods and cultures, and are not as easily accessible as we once might have thought. In 2002, Barbara Rosenwein argued that the ‘debunked theory’ of universalist emotions could no longer stand, urging scholars to instead ‘recognize various emotion styles, emotional communities, emotional outlets, and emotional restraints in every period.’⁷⁶ Indeed, there is now a growing consensus that the way a society understands, expresses, and represents emotion is central to their experience of it; for instance, Jan Plamper has written that, though some universalist theories maintain that emotions are transhistorical and are simply conceptualised in different ways, ‘conceptions of emotions have an impact upon the way emotion is experienced.’⁷⁷ Susan Matt and Peter Stearns have similarly argued that ‘societies influence the expression, repression and meaning of feelings by giving them names and assigning values to some and not to others,’ citing the variability of ‘marital love’ – once regarded as a universal emotion – across different cultures.⁷⁸ This scholarship therefore highlights the importance of paying attention to how contemporaries understood, expressed, and represented emotion in any attempt to unpick the emotional cultures of the past. Nevertheless, the discussion of women’s ‘sentimental’ and ‘emotional’ engagement with their things in the 1990s seems to have been rooted largely in what scholars thought women should feel (or wanted them to feel), rather than an historical and cultural context. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the history of emotions was still in its infancy at this

⁷⁶ Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History,’ *The American Historical Review*, 107:3 (2002): 845.

⁷⁷ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 32.

See also Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, ‘Towards Histories of Emotions’ in *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine*, ed. Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), 15.

⁷⁸ Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, ‘Introduction’ in *Doing Emotions History*, ed. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2.

See also Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart*, 14-15.

point. Nevertheless, as we have seen, these early conclusions remain a mainstay in studies of consumption.

The scholarship on the history of emotions has also shown us that all the people of the past have left behind are traces of the representation and expression of emotion, rather than emotion itself. Susan Matt writes that these traces are usually found in words or symbols, but historians have tended to gravitate towards the former. Words, she continues, 'are not the same as emotions, but they bear a relation to them.'⁷⁹ This calls into question assumptions that things – and, indeed, texts – hold inherent emotional meanings which can be read. Though some studies of objects and emotions have taken notice of this, and most notably the recent volume *Feeling Things*, I argue that it needs to be more fully integrated into the study of women and their things.⁸⁰ I draw on the scholarship on emotions in this thesis in order to argue that we need to stop the quixotic quest for glimpses of 'authentic' emotion in textual sources, a conclusion which can also be applied to the study of objects.⁸¹ This is not to suggest that women did not feel towards their possessions – or, for that matter, towards other people. Rather, in this thesis I make a key contribution to the scholarship by arguing that we should not mistake gendered practices and patterns of consumption for any real or authentic emotional experience. Just because women performed the role of mothers by making shirts for adult sons, for example, it does not necessarily follow that they felt a certain way; I argue that what this *does* demonstrate is that this was a widely understood material expectation of motherhood.

⁷⁹ Susan J. Matt, 'Recovering the Invisible: Methods for the Historical Study of Emotions' in *Doing Emotions History*, 42.

⁸⁰ See the above discussion of McShane, Holloway, and Styles.

⁸¹ Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions,' *Passions in Context*, 1 (2010): 21.

Women and their Clothing

There is therefore no doubt that the association in of women with sentimental and 'soft' consumption is in need of revision, but this does not simply mean providing counterpart claims on the part of men.⁸² Nor does it mean turning to surviving clothing and textiles in order to find confirmation of an emotion already believed to exist in the textual evidence. Instead, I argue that the scholarship requires a reassessment of the existing approaches and methodologies applied to the study of women and their possessions in the eighteenth century. As I have already said, this thesis owes a debt to early feminist scholars who established women and their things as an important area of study in its own right. These scholars rightly challenged contemporary stereotypes of women as excessive, selfish, and emulative consumers, but replaced them with a narrative of sentimental consumption which has stuck in the scholarship; I argue in the first half of this thesis that the evidence deployed in support of this is not sufficient, and I contribute to a reassessment of this scholarship through an examination of women's clothing. As we have seen, clothing has been interpreted as one of the most emotionally potent possessions in a woman's arsenal, and it therefore provides a fertile site at which to begin revising some of the assumptions in the scholarship. However, I have also chosen to look at clothing because it *was* significant for women; though I do not find evidence for sentimental consumption in the sources, clothing raises questions about what women controlled, what they had access to, and what was expected of them. Moreover, it was a possession which all women, rich and poor alike, owned and used. Reflecting the emphasis of previous scholarship, I focus on the eighteenth century, and I discuss the impact of the expanding world of goods available in this period in the first half of the thesis. However, my conclusions about women's consumption can easily be projected backwards or forwards in

⁸² For example, see Lambert, 'Small Presents Confirm Friendship,' 24-32; Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 46-59

time, as the association of women with emotional textiles is by no means exclusive to the eighteenth century.⁸³ Indeed, the work of Jo Turney on knitting suggests that it persists to the present day.⁸⁴ By questioning the evidence deployed in support of this, this thesis poses a challenge to assumptions about women's emotional engagement with their things in the eighteenth century and beyond.

Though 'clothing' may appear to be relatively straightforward, it is worth outlining briefly how I have defined it in this thesis. Also 'clothes' or 'wearing apparel' to contemporaries, clothing could refer to a number of different items. In the context of a woman's wardrobe, this could include stays, shifts, stockings, underpetticoats, petticoats or 'coats,' gowns, aprons, and cloaks. These items formed the core of the eighteenth-century female wardrobe. As Susan Vincent has argued, being clothed in the early modern world revolved around a notion of sufficiency rather than on 'revelation or concealment.'⁸⁵ Being insufficiently covered by clothing was to be naked even if a woman still wore something on the body, and this was highly dependent on context; as we will see in chapters three and four, for instance, women appearing only in their shifts were described as 'undressed.' I have also chosen to include under clothing what might be considered textile accessories, for instance pockets, gloves, ruffles, or handkerchiefs.⁸⁶ Shoes occupy a more ambiguous position, but, though they can be thought of as a category of their own, I have counted them as clothing in this

⁸³ For earlier periods, see Holloway, 'Textiles,' 161.

⁸⁴ Jo Turney, 'Making Love with Needles,' 302-11.

⁸⁵ Susan Vincent, 'From the Cradle to the Grave: Clothing the early modern body' in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body 1500 to the Present*, ed. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 165.

⁸⁶ 'Ruffles' were removable trimmings often made of lace, and were attached to the sleeves of gowns.

study.⁸⁷ This decision was driven by the sources themselves; while no shoes were bequeathed in the wills looked at in chapter one, for example, the accounts discussed in chapter two record frequent expenditure on purchasing and mending them. Finally, I have included linen under clothing, though chapter four explores it as a category in its own right. 'Linen' did not simply refer to items made of a linen fabric, but rather to a specific group of textiles; shifts, aprons, shirts, handkerchiefs, and stockings could belong to this, for instance, while gowns could not. What set linen items of clothing apart from the rest of the wardrobe was the fact that they were regularly laundered.

Throughout this thesis we find clothing that is made, unmade, mended, altered, clean, dirty, wet, or dry, and we need to remember that it might move in and out of these states several times. A gown might be taken apart for cleaning, for instance, or altered to suit a changing body shape or new fashion. Clothing described as 'unmade' probably referred to cut-out pattern pieces yet to be stitched together. While smaller items like hoods and gloves could be purchased ready-made, larger items like gowns and shifts usually had to be 'made up.' This involved purchasing fabric, and then paying a tailor, mantuamaker, or seamstress to make the item. Margaret Spufford suggested that some chapmen were beginning to stock ready-made items of clothing in the seventeenth century, and this trade had grown significantly by the end of the eighteenth with items like shifts and stays becoming increasingly available.⁸⁸ However, John Styles has argued that the trade's growth was not as dramatic as previously

⁸⁷ For example, see Giorgio Riello, *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁸ Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England*, 125.

On the ready-made stay trade, see Lynn Sorge-English, *Stays and body image in London: The staymaking trade, 1680-1810* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011): 133.

On the ready-made pocket trade, see Barbara Burman and Jonathan White, 'Fanny's Pockets: Cotton, Consumption and Domestic Economy, 1780-1850' in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36.

thought, and, indeed, the century does seem to be characterised by tradition rather than change.⁸⁹ Women from across the social hierarchy continued to have their gowns made for them, rather than purchasing them ready-made (though women of the labouring classes might also purchase them second-hand). I have therefore included fabric and textile trimmings under the broad umbrella of clothing, as they are an important part of this process. This is most relevant in chapter two as I calculate expenditure on clothing from different account books, but it runs throughout the thesis as well. Of course, we cannot know whether all these textiles actually became clothing, and it is entirely possible that some were made into curtains, counterpanes, or cushion covers. Nevertheless, it is important to take the processes of acquisition, maintenance, and replacement into account in any discussion of clothing.

The items of clothing owned by women from across the social hierarchy were largely the same, but differed in both quantity and quality. A woman belonging to the middling classes would likely own more gowns than her labouring counterpart, for instance, and they would probably be made of finer and more expensive fabrics. Clothing was also something all women needed access to, and, as we will see in chapter four, owning only one change of it was the ultimate indication of poverty. I look at the clothing of a range of women from across the social hierarchy in this thesis, from paupers reliant on the parish to members of the gentry. The clothing of elite women is largely absent from my discussion, though I do look at the bills of the titled Lady Emma Child in chapter two. By 'gentry,' I mean those with landed interests who rested below the ranks of the elite, though this was by no means a position set in stone; the boundaries between gentry and middling class were permeable, and it was not uncommon for individuals – and for women in particular – to move up and down this scale

⁸⁹ Styles, 'Clothing the North,' 140, 160.

See also Miles Lambert, 'Bespoke Versus Ready-Made: The Work of the Tailor in Eighteenth-Century Britain,' *Costume*, 44:1 (2010): 56-65.

during their lifetime. In Amanda Vickery's words, the ranks of the middling classes were positioned 'below the nobility in the social hierarchy but above the vulgar,' comprising the 'lesser gentry, distressed gentlewomen, doctors, surgeons, lawyers, clerics, school-masters, governesses, architects and stone masons, farmers, shopkeepers and manufacturers.'⁹⁰ Labouring women also appear throughout the chapters in this thesis, but are by no means as well represented as those further up the social hierarchy. By 'labouring,' I refer to that part of the population who survived day-to-day by their own labour, but, as Alexandra Shepard has pointed out, this was in no sense a homogenous category as there was an 'intricately graded hierarchy of skilled and unskilled labour, not to mention the wide range of labouring work that by-passed the market economy.'⁹¹ Finally, I look in chapter four at what we might term 'poor' women – those who were forced to turn to charitable assistance in order to survive. This includes pauper women who sought both financial and material relief from their local parishes.

Though increasing attention has been paid to the labouring population and their clothing, we remain handicapped by the lack of sources available. In contrast, source material concerning the middling classes and the gentry is plentiful, and can be found in collections of family papers across almost every local archive in the country. Though I make a conscious effort to draw on the experiences of a number of different women, my emphasis therefore often rests on women from further up the social hierarchy, and especially so in the first half of the thesis. Arguments about sentimental consumption have also been made most often for these women, rather than for labouring women. This perhaps mirrors the source material available, as texts which seem to record women's own words like wills and account books become sparser and sparser as we move further down the

⁹⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 6.

⁹¹ Alexandra Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England,' *Past and Present*, 201:1 (2008): 55.

social scale. However, this introduces issues surrounding authorship, as scholars usually assume that emotion can only be found in the words of an owner of a thing. By arguing that we cannot look to description alone for evidence of emotion, my analysis throws the assumed link between authorship and emotion into question. Moreover, in chapter four I demonstrate that women of the labouring classes were able to use clothing as a rhetorical tool in trials for infanticide. This suggests that we can still find evidence of agency – albeit a limited agency – for these women.

Though previous studies have tended to focus on the consumption practices of one social group at a time, I explore some productive ways in which we might draw across them in this thesis. The experiences of women in service, for example, run throughout the chapters.⁹² I also look across the life cycle, which, as well as being determined culturally and chronologically, was closely related to economic position. For labouring women, the expected stages in the life cycle were service, marriage, motherhood, and widowhood. This was largely the same for women of the middling classes and gentry, though they missed out service and went straight to marriage. It is important to bear in mind, however, that not every woman experienced these stages. Single women, for example, bypassed many of them. In this thesis I therefore look at women across various stages in the life cycle, and so we find servants, single women, mothers, and widows. One stage I do not explore in detail is childhood, though I do touch in places on the provisioning of clothing for children. I also pay close attention to the relationship between economic position and the stages in the life cycle. For example, in chapter four I demonstrate that women from across the social hierarchy experienced the same stage in different ways. While Catherine Ettrick was able to bear the costs of separating from her abusive husband, for example, the

⁹² For example, Vickery has looked at the women of the gentry, Berg at the middling classes, and Styles at the labouring population.

Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods'; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*; Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes'; Styles, *The Dress of the People*.

labouring Mary Vezey was not. It is also clear that economic circumstance and the life cycle both had a decisive impact on how women acquired clothing, as well as where this clothing was described, and by whom. Though women of the middling classes and gentry recorded their own expenditure on clothing, for example, the clothing of pauper women was accounted for them by Overseers of the Poor. And, while wives and widows were often responsible for clothing a number of dependents, single women usually found themselves providing largely for themselves.

Sources and Methodology

The sources used in this thesis date predominantly from the period 1700 to 1800, though some come from as early as 1680, and others as late as 1830. I have deliberately drawn on sources ranging from across the century throughout the thesis, though some sections are inevitably stronger on this than others. Chapter one offers the widest range of dates, chiefly because it also looks at the largest sample of sources – 401 women’s wills, and 1,012 issues of the *Daily Advertiser*. And, because of this, an awareness of change over time is most explicit in this chapter as I chart a rise in description across the century. In chapter two, I have similarly attempted to examine different account books and collections of bills which date from across the period, though this has its limitations in the sources available; for instance, accounting appears to have become a more widespread skill amongst women as the eighteenth century wore on. In chapters three and four I take a slightly different approach, as my discussion is not explicitly focused on offering chronological breadth. Instead, it is intended to suggest new sources and approaches to the study of women’s clothing. So, chapter three deliberately focuses in detail on events which took place between 1752 and 1768, and, though I look across the century in my discussion of trials for infanticide, chapter four similarly offers in-depth case

studies of particular people and events. Nevertheless, I make sure to situate these case studies in their wider cultural and chronological contexts.

In this thesis I concentrate primarily on women who lived in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, or were born there. This focus was determined largely by the reach of the Dean and Chapter Court of York, which exercised probate jurisdiction over fifteen parishes and townships in Yorkshire, six in Nottinghamshire, and three in Lancashire, as well as fourteen parishes in the City of York itself.⁹³ The wills I discuss in chapter one were proved by this court, and I also offer a more detailed discussion of its jurisdiction in this chapter; however, it is important to note here that it has broadly dictated the geographical reach of this study. This decision was driven largely by a need to identify a manageable and cohesive set of sources on which to base my analysis. Some of the sources looked at in this thesis – women’s account books, for instance – can be found in plentiful numbers in archives scattered across the country, and identifying them all would be a mammoth task. By focusing on a specific geographical area, I was therefore able to narrow this down to more effectively identify useful sources. This was primarily a practical decision, and it is not my intention to explore specific regional characteristics, or to look at any differences between country, town, or city – though these are certainly questions which merit further attention. Rather, in this thesis I offer meaningful methodological interventions in the way that we use these texts, which has a significance for the study of sources ranging from across the country.

My discussion is also peppered throughout with sources which originate in London, a decision which was again dictated by practicality and availability. In particular, I have drawn on two online databases which offer invaluable access

⁹³ ‘Guide to Probate Courts,’ *Borthwick Institute for Archives*, University of York (accessed 7 April, 2015) <https://www.york.ac.uk/borthwick/holdings/guides/research-guides/probate-courts/#deanandchapter>.

to digitised source materials; chapter one offers an analysis of advertisements placed in the London newspaper the *Daily Advertiser*, which are available through the 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Database, and chapter four looks at the digitised Proceedings of the Old Bailey.⁹⁴ Again, I do not set out in my analysis to consider the relationship between London as a ‘fashion’ capital and the provinces, though a number of scholars have done just this.⁹⁵ Drawing these London sources together with those from Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire is not without its flaws, and I acknowledge this throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, I also argue that the fact that the wills and account books of women living in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire share a language of description with London newspaper advertisements is in itself significant.

Manuscript sources are at the core of my analysis, though I also draw on some printed texts. In particular, in the first chapter I compare printed newspaper advertisements with women’s wills, in the second I briefly consider the relationship between ‘how-to’ manuals and manuscript account books, and in the final chapter I analyse the published Proceedings of the Old Bailey. The four chapters in the thesis are split into two thematic halves, and the sources used broadly correspond with this. The first half of the thesis looks at sources which tell us about the purchase, upkeep, and dispersal of clothing: wills, newspaper

⁹⁴ 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Database (accessed December 5, 2017) <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/newspdigproj/burney/>; The Proceedings of the Old Bailey (accessed December 5, 2017) <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>.

⁹⁵ For example, see See for example Helen Berry, ‘Prudent Luxury: The Metropolitan Tastes of Judith Baker, Durham Gentlewoman’ in *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England: ‘On the Town’*, ed. Rosemary Sweet and Penelope Lane (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 133-55; Danae Tankard, “They tell me they were in fashion last year”: Samuel and Elizabeth Jeake and Clothing Fashions in Late Seventeenth-Century London and Rye,’ *Costume*, 50:1 (2016): 20-41; Jon Stobart, ‘Status, gender and life cycle in the consumption practices of the English elite. The case of Mary Leigh, 1735-1806,’ *Social History*, 40:1 (2015): 101; Edwina Ehrman, ‘Dressing Well in Old Age: The Clothing Accounts of Martha Dodson, 1746-1765,’ *Costume*, 40:1 (2006): 28-36.

advertises for lost and stolen clothing, accounts, and bills. Some of these documents were produced by individual women, but I also look at bills and receipts issued by merchants, which were often created by men. This allows for an exploration of issues of authorship, as, for example, it is usually assumed that the descriptions of clothing found in women's account books were authored by them alone. However, in chapter two I demonstrate that these descriptions were likely moved into these books from other texts. Probate documents and accounts have formed staple sources in studies of consumption ever since the field first began to develop, and so there is a wide pool of scholarship on which to draw here. Nevertheless, I make deliberate methodological interventions in my analysis of these sources. My main contribution is a challenge to how we read and write about the description of clothing across them, but I also offer more source-specific interventions.

The second half of the thesis turns to sources more unfamiliar to the study of women and their clothing: court records. Here, I do not mean unfamiliar in the sense that these records have not previously been used; indeed, trials for theft have been effectively mined for details about clothing theft – what was stolen, who it was stolen from and by, where it was stolen – and especially so in the context of plebeian consumption.⁹⁶ However, the role of clothing in other types of litigation has remained underexplored. This is partly because trials which deal with theft seem to be straightforwardly about clothing in a way that others do not – they appear to confirm that the things described as stolen were real, that

⁹⁶ For example, see Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism,' 255-76; Lynn MacKay, 'Why They Stole: Women in the Old Bailey, 1779-1789,' *Journal of Social History*, 32:3 (1999): 625; Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked," 28; Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William J. Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age: The case of the Old Bailey,' *Journal of Art Historiography*, 11 (2014):1-25; Clare Rose, 'Bought, stolen, bequeathed, preserved: sources for the study of 18th-century petticoats' in *Textiles and Text: Re-establishing the Links between Archival and Object-based Research*, ed. Maria Hayward and Elizabeth Kramer (London: Archetype Publications, 2007), 114-20.

they actually existed and belonged to someone. In contrast, clothing in the context of other types of litigation offers a more ambiguous blend of the real, the imagined, and the rhetorical. It is studies of other topics – gender, crime, marital violence, rape, infanticide – which have noted the role clothing could play in court, rather than the scholarship on consumption.⁹⁷ Moreover, things often took on a more active role in this context than do items listed in an indictment. Chapter three, for example, offers a detailed analysis of the manuscript records created by one suit for marital separation in which clothing influenced events, shaped the narratives presented in court, and offered material evidence of relationships. By offering an analysis of these sources, I demonstrate that they can usefully add to the study of consumption.

There exists an acceptance in much of the scholarship on clothing, as well as consumption more generally, that we must make do with glimpses gleaned from a number of different sources, especially as we move further and further down the social hierarchy. Giorgio Riello has written that ‘some consolation can come from historians’ ability to collect broken voices,’ which can be ‘found in diaries, letters, memoirs, wills, inventories, even accounts.’ Voices can even be ‘carefully extrapolated,’ he continues, from documents like trial accounts ‘that were not

⁹⁷ For example, see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 106; Garthine Walker, ‘Sexual Violence and Rape in Europe, 1500-1750’ in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body 1500 to the Present*, 434; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [2003]), 58-59; Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese, ‘Marital Cruelty: reconsidering lay attitudes in England, c. 1580-1850,’ *The History of the Family*, 18:3 (2013): 295-97; Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 102; Samantha Williams, ‘The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth for Unmarried Mothers in London, 1760-1866,’ *Women’s History Review*, 20:1 (2011): 69.

necessarily intended to be used to know more about people's lives.'⁹⁸ There is therefore a sense that historians of consumption have been driven to use sources which can only grant broken insight into the study of things. However, I demonstrate throughout the thesis that an understanding of how and why a source was produced, as well the purpose it was intended for, is central to understanding what it can tell us about women's clothing. This might seem like a straightforward methodological point which should go without saying; nevertheless, I suggest that many texts in the study of consumption have been mined for details about clothing or things, which are then extracted without proper attention being paid to the source itself. For example, in the first two chapters I show that a more informed methodological approach applied to wills and account books throws into doubt arguments that description offers evidence of emotion in these sources. Collating details gathered from a number of different sources can prove fruitful, as I demonstrate in chapter four, but we cannot divorce these sources from the circumstances in which they were produced simply because they mention clothing.

There is a glaring – and deliberate – omission in this thesis, which is that it does not look to letters and diaries as a source; I consider only one set of manuscript correspondence in chapter four, in order to explore the way in which linen was deployed in letters seeking charitable assistance. Letters and diaries have been used often by scholars who look at women and consumption, though predictably those which survive belong overwhelmingly to members of the middling classes and above. They are understood to offer more ready access to the thoughts and feelings of individuals than any other source – Susan Matt, for example, has written that they 'more fully reveal how individuals themselves felt and expressed emotion.'⁹⁹ As we have seen, Amanda Vickery's analysis of Elizabeth

⁹⁸ Giorgio Riello, 'The Material Culture of Walking: Spaces of Methodologies in the Long Eighteenth Century' in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings*, ed. Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012 [2010]), 41.

⁹⁹ Matt, 'Recovering the Invisible,' 49.

Shackleton is based on ‘thousands of letters she received and wrote,’ and thirty-nine ‘minutely detailed’ diaries. Though she also argued that Shackleton understood and used her possessions in a number of ways – ‘to honour God and her family, to lend substance to her relationships and ultimately as reassurance in the face of death’ – it is the sentimentalism described by Vickery which has stuck.¹⁰⁰ Scholars have looked outwards from this in order to find confirmation of the same emotional engagement in other sources; thus, descriptions of clothing in women’s wills have similarly been read as confirmation of sentimental attachments both to people and to things. Though I do not offer a sustained analysis of letters and diaries in this thesis, the questions I ask of my source material might also be usefully applied to them.

Another absent source which needs to be addressed is surviving artefacts – or ‘objects.’ In the past twenty years or so there has been a boom in historical ‘material culture studies,’ though historians are by no means the first to integrate objects into their research. The increasing attention paid to consumption in the scholarship has had a significant impact on this, drawing scholars’ attention to the importance of things. By definition, material culture consists ‘not merely of “things,” but also of the meanings they hold for people,’ and historians have explored its role in both creating meaning and shaping it.¹⁰¹ As Karen Harvey writes, material culture ‘encapsulates not just the physical attributes of an object, but the myriad and shifting contexts through which it acquires meaning.’¹⁰² In *Stuff*, Daniel Miller argues for a shift in material culture studies from an approach centred on semiotics – in other words, on objects as

¹⁰⁰ Vickery, ‘Women and the world of goods,’ 292-94; Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, 11, 184-85, 193.

¹⁰¹ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, ‘Introduction: Writing Material Culture History’ in *Writing Material Culture History*, 2; Karen Harvey, ‘Introduction’ in *History and Material Culture*, 1, 5; Hannah Greig, Jane Hamlett, and Leonie Hannan, ‘Introduction: Gender and Material Culture’ in *Gender and Material Culture in Britain*, 5; White, ‘A World of Goods?’ 102.

¹⁰² Harvey, ‘Introduction,’ 3.

signs and symbols – to one in which they play ‘a considerable and active part in constituting the particular experience of the self,’ and it is now widely accepted in the scholarship that objects are ‘active and autonomous, not simply reflective.’¹⁰³ Christopher Tilley argues that, above all, what this perspective stresses is that things ‘intervene in the social world...How we think, and how we act, depends as much on the objects we surround ourselves with, and encounter, as on the languages we may use, or the intentions we may have.’¹⁰⁴ In this thesis, I recognise that objects – in this instance clothing – are more than simply receptacles for meaning; for instance, in chapter 3 I demonstrate that women’s clothing was not just used as a symbol of marital cruelty in suits for separation, but that the placement of clothing could affect the movement of people around a household. However, the agency of objects remains difficult to determine, and, as the editors of *Feeling Things* suggest, rather than seeing objects as wholly independent or equal agents, we should perhaps view them as ‘mediators’ in human transactions; objects, they write, ‘produce and transmit feeling’ but ‘tend not to “feel” back.’¹⁰⁵

Another important aspect of material culture studies is the analysis of surviving objects in order to gain insights beyond those offered by textual sources, though not all studies of material culture do so.¹⁰⁶ Giorgio Riello, for example, has argued that objects ‘have an immediacy that puts historians in contact with the past.’¹⁰⁷ And clothing, which can retain ‘the body’s impression in the worn fibres

¹⁰³ Daniel Miller, *Stuff*, 16; Harvey, ‘Introduction,’ 5; Greig, Hamlett, and Hannan, ‘Introduction,’ 5.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Tilley, ‘Theoretical Perspectives’ in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage, 2006), 4.

¹⁰⁵ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, ‘A Feeling For Things,’ 9.

¹⁰⁶ Lemire, ‘Draping the body,’ 99.

For example, Welch, ed., *Fashioning the Early Modern* contains ‘Object in Focus’ chapters.

¹⁰⁷ Riello, ‘The Material Culture of Walking,’ 41.

of a coat,' has been understood as a particularly intimate and personal survival, offering access to human experience which textual sources alone cannot provide.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, a number of studies have urged scholars to look beyond text, citing an overreliance on written sources to the neglect of objects.¹⁰⁹ By this, they mean turning to material sources which are not inscribed with words – clothing and textiles, for instance (though these things could also contain text). And, this can prove a fruitful approach; both John Styles and Sally Holloway have emphasised that the study of objects can tell us about people who left behind no textual sources.¹¹⁰ Textual sources – like the wills, account books, bills, newspaper advertisements, and court records looked at in this thesis – are, of course, objects in their own right, though they are most often mined by historians for the words they contain. Diana Barnes, for instance, has drawn attention to the importance of the 'non-verbal' qualities of manuscript letters like tearstains and ink blots, while Leonie Hannan has argued that the 'material and spatial experience of letter-writing helped shape the meaning of correspondence.'¹¹¹ This reminder of the materiality of textual sources is perhaps most significant in chapter two, when I demonstrate that the processes of accounting – the shifting of information from text to text and the handling of different documents – are central to our understanding of the sources produced by them.

Surviving objects perhaps also seem to offer a more reassuring presence than those found in textual sources, as their tangibility – their very thingness –

¹⁰⁸ Lemire, 'Draping the body and dressing the home,' 99; Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011 [2002]), 52.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey, 'Introduction,' 5; Downes, Holloway, and Randles, 'A Feeling For Things,' 10, 12.

¹¹⁰ Styles, 'Threads of Feeling,' 70; Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects,' 264-65.

¹¹¹ Diana G. Barnes, 'Emotional Debris in Early Modern Letters' in *Feeling Things*, 45; Leonie Hannan, 'Women's Letters: Eighteenth-Century Letter-Writing and the Life of the Mind' in *Gender and Material Culture*, 32, 46.

appears to confirm that that they were owned, held, and used by a person in the past. Indeed, some scholars have even expressed frustration that we cannot match textual sources with surviving objects.¹¹² There is a growing consensus that any study of material culture and consumption must necessarily be impoverished without object analysis.¹¹³ Indeed, I began research for this thesis with an intention to use surviving objects as sources; however, as I questioned more and more the approaches taken to textual sources like wills and account books, I found that many of these same assumptions were being carried over to the study of objects. Surviving textiles are read as ‘sentimental’ or ‘emotional,’ invested with a meaning which can still be unpicked hundreds of years later.¹¹⁴ And again, clothing has been understood as particularly potent sites for this, especially as making, decorating, and providing it was often women’s work. There is no doubt that textile provision *was* gendered, as is demonstrated by my discussion of the provision of linen in chapter four. However, I argue that we cannot simply turn to objects for confirmation of what we think written sources have already told us. I therefore focus in this thesis on revising methodologies for textual sources, but this also has wider implications for the study of women and their clothing. Moreover, in chapters three and four I question the emphasis in the scholarship on inventorying or listing ‘real’ things, and demonstrate that exploring the rhetorical work clothing was doing in different contexts can also usefully add to our understanding. In fact, the contradictory accounts often offered in court suggest that at least some of these things were imagined or didn’t exist, though they were still deployed as evidence.

¹¹² Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009): 45.

¹¹³ Karen Harvey, ‘Introduction,’ 1, 5.

¹¹⁴ For example, see Sasha Handley, ‘The Radical History of a Bed Sheet,’ *History Workshop*, June 6, 2017 (accessed December 5, 2017) <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-radical-history-of-a-bed-sheet/>.

Chapter Outlines

The thesis is structured in two halves, the first corresponding broadly with 'description' and the second with 'use,' though the two themes overlap throughout. In chapter one, I offer an analysis of the clothing bequests in a sample of wills dating between 1696 and 1830, and test claims that specific groups of women were more likely to leave detailed bequests of clothing than others. Though bequests of clothing containing detailed description have been read as emotional by scholars, I demonstrate that this was only one type of clothing bequest of many; moreover, I argue that, while these bequests *were* gendered, they cannot be read as evidence of sentiment. I then move in this chapter to a discussion of 212 advertisements placed in the *Daily Advertiser* between 1731 and 1796, which describe lost, stolen, and found clothing. The description of clothing – and other goods – in these adverts has been interpreted as unnecessary, and therefore emotional. However, I argue that the description of clothing cannot offer evidence for this. Not only is authorship difficult to determine, but these adverts needed to use a language of description which would be widely recognised and understood. In the final section of this chapter, I draw the wills and newspaper adverts together in order to compare the descriptive language used across them. Though some clear differences between the two sources do emerge, I demonstrate that they share a world of goods, as well as a widely available language with which to describe them. As this world of goods expanded across the century, descriptions of these things increasingly circulated across different sources.

I turn to an analysis of account books in chapter two, looking at the account books of seven individual women. I argue that the different stages in the life cycle impacted on the proportion of yearly expenditure a woman might dedicate to clothing, as well as how much clothing she provided for other people. I also demonstrate in this analysis that the emphasis on household accounting in the

scholarship is not appropriate for all women, as some of these account books also record expenditure on clothing for family members. Finally, I move to a discussion of the role of description in accounting. The description of clothing in account books has variously been read by scholars as careful, meticulous, emotional – and even unnecessary. Drawing on the discussion in the previous chapter, I argue that these descriptions cannot be read in this way; detailed description was a regular aspect of accounting, and I demonstrate that the account books also share a language of description with the wills and newspaper adverts discussed in the chapter one. Moreover, I make a clear methodological intervention as I argue that we need to reintegrate the processes of textual transmission into our understanding of women's account books. Through an analysis of bills, I demonstrate that the descriptions of clothing found in women's account books were often moved over from texts authored by somebody else.

Chapters three and four are intended to suggest some productive ways forward in the study of women and their clothing, as well as some new sources. In chapter three, I offer a detailed analysis of Catherine Ettrick's suit for separation from her husband William, which was first brought in front of the Durham Consistory Court in 1765. Bringing together the scholarship on consumption with the historiography on marital violence and breakdown, I explore how an analysis of this case might add to our understanding of the wider expectations surrounding clothing and marriage in this period. In the first section of this chapter, I look at how Catherine's clothing was described in different ways in order to support the opposing narratives presented to the court. I then move to a discussion of clothing in use, looking at how the movement of clothing and people was used to signal the disorder of the Ettrick household. I demonstrate that clothing was given a more active role than has previously been recognised in the scholarship on marital violence and breakdown, as it influenced events and shaped the narratives presented in court. I also make a methodological

intervention in the wider use of court records in this chapter, as I argue against conflating the narratives and different documents generated in this suit.

Finally, I offer a different approach in chapter four by taking the category of 'linen' as the starting point for my analysis. I demonstrate that linen could be used as a rhetorical tool in different contexts, which in turn speaks to wider understandings of its role. The chapter is structured around three themes – provision, poverty, and deprivation – and in the first section I look at the provision of linen by mothers. Some of the account books looked at in chapter two record expenditure on linen for adult sons, which demonstrates that motherhood had very material expectations. This began before a child had even been born, as pregnant women were expected to begin gathering childbed linen. I therefore explore the role of childbed linen in 216 trials for infanticide heard in the Old Bailey between 1680 and 1830, looking at how and why it was deployed as evidence in this context. I demonstrate that this sheds light on wider understandings, as gathering childbed linen clearly demonstrated that a woman had begun to fulfil the material expectations of motherhood. In the second section of this chapter, I turn to the provision of linen for single women by offering a case study of Sarah Dawes of Elland, Halifax. I argue that linen was used as a rhetorical device in begging letters sent on Dawes's behalf, and I demonstrate that it was owning no change of linen which was most indicative of her poverty. While some single women were able to provide, maintain, and replace their own linen by virtue of their economic position, Sarah Dawes became increasingly unable to do so in her old age. I also draw in both of these sections on three sets of Overseers' Accounts, which grant insight into the experiences of women in receipt of clothing from the parish. In the final section of this chapter, I take a similar methodological approach to that in chapter three as I offer an in-depth case study of one trial for murder. In 1732, Corbert Vezey stood accused of killing his wife Mary by making an assault on her, locking her up against her will in a garret room, and depriving her of 'sufficient Meat, Drink, and

other Necessaries to sustain life.’¹¹⁵ I look at how Mary’s linen was used in this trial to support opposing claims, as a number of witnesses used dirty or missing linen to suggest Vezey’s failure to fulfil the material expectations of marriage, while others claimed that he had given his wife access to ‘good’ or ‘clean’ linen.

¹¹⁵ OBP, January 1732, Corbert Vezey (t17320114-12).

Chapter One:

Wills and Newspaper Advertisements

Introduction

On 7 February 1779 Mary Braithwait, a spinster of York, signed her last will and testament, which would be proved just two months later in front of the Dean and Chapter Court of York. In this document, she left instructions for her executrix regarding the disposal of her household goods and clothing following her death:

I desire my Executrix will as soon after my Decease as convenient Sell and Dispose of my Furniture and other things not herein Disposed of (Save and except all my Books Linen and Wearing apparel which I do Give and Bequeath to my said Executrix to be by her Sold or Disposed of as she shall think proper, but to Give no part thereof to my Sister Catherine She being in my opinion well provided for)¹

Although it bears Mary's own signature, the hand the will is written in is not her own and it was probably dictated by her to a scribe, scrivener, public notary, or a member of the local clergy.² Though the will dealt broadly with the disposal of her 'Linen and Wearing apparel,' and specified that her sister Catherine was not to receive any 'part thereof,' Mary also left further instruction on the fate of her clothing in a series of additional notes, written on scraps of paper and attached to her will. Most likely in her own hand rather than that of a scribe, they are difficult to read and lack an apparent structure.³ Additions are scribbled between

¹ BOR, Dean and Chapter Court of York Probate Records (hereafter D&C Court), microform, reel 1255, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

² Nigel Goose and Nesta Evans, 'Wills as an Historical Source' in *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, edited by Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans and Nigel Goose (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2000), 47-49.

³ Mary was able to apply a signature to her will, and the handwriting appears to match.

lines as though they have only just been remembered, and only one bears a date – 21 January 1779. This suggests that, though they have been identified as codicils – later changes or additions to a will – some of these instructions may well have been written and signed before Mary even completed it. Their presence in her probate records, however, suggests that they were still taken into account when her will was proved.

One of the notes included in Braithwait's probate records leaves a list of things 'For My Sister Grace' including

My black quilted petticoat I pledge a parcele I have put up for her in the Drawers & a paper box derected for her a little red trunk & all in it under the end of my chest my spectacles my ould black bonnet in my chest a piece of new silk rold upon a [stick] to make her one when she wants...⁴

Inserted in tiny letters between the two top rows of writing are '2 flanel petticoats 2 flanel aprons & wastcoats.' In the same document Braithwait also left '2 fine Cloth aprons marked with black on the binding,' '2 Shifts marked [E A],' and a 'double cambric handkerchief [and] some of my best nightcaps' to her sister Isabel Smith, as well as 'my New black bonnet' to her niece Mary Smith. Another codicil states that 'as my Sister Kitty dos not want any... I desire my executors will dispose of my apparill & linnen as they think proper to my other sisters to my sister Grace in particular' and, again, another recommends that

the rest of my & cloaths undisposed [of] I desire my executors will give as they think proper...as to my sister Kitty she wants not any thing but my poor helpless sister Grace I must recommend her⁵

It is not immediately clear what she meant when she wrote that Kitty – presumably the 'Catherine' mentioned in her will – did not 'want any.' Perhaps Kitty had already expressed this to her, or, as is more likely when we take into

⁴ BOR, D&C Court, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

⁵ BOR, D&C Court, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

account the wording of the will, Braithwait herself had decided that Kitty did not want for any clothing. Mary Braithwait's probate records are a rare example of an eighteenth-century woman's thoughts and intentions – written in her own hand – spilling out beyond the pages of a will. They offer a glimpse behind the decision-making processes involved in allocating bequests of clothing and, in reading these additional notes alongside her will, several things become apparent. They tell us that in the months leading up to her death, she was clearly constructing and directing parcels of goods and clothing for individual female family members and friends, and that she left specific instructions as to where they could be found. They reiterate the attention placed on her sister Grace, as she emphasises again and again that, while one sister did not want for clothing, Grace did. One codicil even requests that Frances Beal take in her sister (the 'helpless' Grace) and 'continue with her till her decease,' and that 'what ever [Grace] wants making or mending Fanny will do it for her & keep her neat & clean.'⁶ Chapter four discusses this link between caring for a person and caring for their clothing in more detail. Finally, they show us Braithwait describing her own clothing in different ways – as black, old, best, new, cambric, cloth, and flannel. In the absence of probate records as expansive as Mary Braithwait's, it is descriptions like this which historians have turned to in order to explore female bequests of clothing.

Nearly three years after Mary Braithwait signed her will in York, an anonymous individual placed an advertisement in the London newspaper the *Daily*

Advertiser:

DROPT out of a Hackney Coach in Windmill-Street, near the End of Brewer-Street, Golden-Square, between Six and Seven o'Clock Tuesday Evening last, a Caravan-Box, covered with Paper, with a Lock to it, in a coarse Bag, and corded; containing one green Tabby Gown, lined with a light-grey Persian, topt with Yellow; one Laylock flowered Cotton Gown; one white, single, Dimity Petticoat; one purple and white Cotton bed-Gown, lined with Callico; one black Sattin Cloak, with a broad Lace; four Shifts, marked B at the Bottom; a Muslin Apron worked with the Needle; a flowered Kentin Apron; a flowered Muslin scolloped

⁶ BOR, D&C Court, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

Apron; three Cloth Aprons; one Muslin Handkerchief edged with Lace; one ditto with broad Lace; two bordered Muslin Handkerchiefs; one muslin ditto, trimmed with Fringe; three white Pocket Handkerchiefs; seven coloured ditto; four Pair of Robbins; four Pair of Cotton Stockings; two Night Caps; one Pair of black Silk Mittens; one Pair of Fawn-coloured Leather Gloves, and two Napkins. Whoever brings the Box, with the Contents, to No. 19, Poland Street, Oxford-Street, shall receive Two Guineas Reward.⁷

This was one of thousands of advertisements placed over the century which dealt with goods which had been lost, left, stolen, or dropped; often it was the owners themselves who advertised this loss, but things which had been ‘found’ or ‘stopped’ under suspicion of theft also filled the pages of newspapers. Though they both deal in some way with loss – in writing a will a testatrix prepares for her death, while newspaper advertisements speak very loudly of material loss – this advertisement may appear to have little in common with Mary Braithwait’s will and codicils. The two sources serve a very different purpose, one dealing with the dispersal of property, and the other with reuniting an owner with their possessions. However, Jonathon Prude points to similarities between the two sources, suggesting that runaway advertisements – in which the runaways’ clothing was frequently described – ‘resembled the careful iteration of property in documents like wills and probate records.’⁸ In this chapter, I explore this in more detail and argue that, rather than simply appearing to be similar, the two sources share a world of goods.

Though very few women wrote them in their own hand, wills can still be regarded as ‘one of the main genres in which women wrote, or dictated, during the early modern period.’⁹ Marcia Pointon has even argued that they are ‘forms

⁷ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 5 December 1782.

⁸ Jonathon Prude, ‘To Look upon the “Lower Sort”: Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800,’ *The Journal of American History*, 78:1 (1991): 137.

⁹ Lloyd Davis, ‘Women’s Wills in Early Modern England’ in *Women, property, and the letters of the law in early modern England*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, A.R. Buck, and Nancy E. Wright (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), 219.

of representation spoken with a female voice albeit within a patriarchal system,' granting us rare insight into the voices of women.¹⁰ Indeed, there can be little doubt that the words used to describe possessions in the pages of a will are often the testatrix's own; as Catherine Richardson writes, 'wills give us some contact, however scribally mediated, with the language in which individuals described their own material environment.'¹¹ When writing a will, the testatrix had to ensure that her intentions – or her 'will' – were as clearly articulated as possible, and this meant deploying descriptions which executors and administrators could easily understand. Nestled between generic phrases like 'I commit my soul into the hands of Almighty God,' these descriptions seem to offer us glimpses of an authentic voice, and this is perhaps partly what has led scholars to focus so intently on them. Of course, probate records generally exclude the very poorest members of society, and women were overwhelmingly less likely to make a will than were men. And, of those who did, widows and single women dominate. Though some married women did make a will, this was much rarer as, under the doctrine of coverture, they required their husband's permission to do so. It is much more difficult to determine authorship in the context of a newspaper advertisement; while some were clearly penned by the victim of a loss or theft, advertisements were variously placed by intermediaries, servants who had misplaced their mistresses' possessions, washerwomen who had lost their clients' linens, people who had found or stopped lost or stolen goods, and, in some instances, it is not unlikely that an advert was placed by the thief of an item themselves. So, while placing an advertisement undoubtedly offered some women the opportunity to describe their clothing, it is significant that in the pages of lost and found advertisements we see lots of different people describing lots of different possessions. The language used therefore had to be something which was widely recognised and understood, as it placed these possessions on public display.

¹⁰ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 2-3.

¹¹ Catherine Richardson, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality' in *Writing Material Culture History*, 49-50.

As we have seen, wills have been interpreted as offering valuable evidence of women's emotional and sentimental attachments both to people and their possessions. This has its roots in Maxine Berg's 1996 article 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England,' in which she argues that 'bequests show us that women to a far higher degree than men noticed their possessions, attached value and emotional significance to these.'¹² In 1997, Marcia Pointon similarly wrote that 'the writing of wills is an imaginative as well as a legal act, permitting women to delineate objects they held dear and to name people for whom they had particular feelings,' and both refer back to Amanda Vickery's work on the 'sentimental materialism' of Elizabeth Shackleton. Women, Berg and Pointon argue, were displaying the same emotional engagement with the possessions described in their wills as Vickery found in Shackleton's many letters and diaries.¹³ In Berg's discussion, clothing takes on a particularly significant role for women as 'a way of passing on something of themselves, a token and a memory.' In bequeathing items of clothing, she argues, they also passed on something of themselves.¹⁴ These assertions stem partly from the fact that, as this chapter will show, women overwhelmingly left bequests of clothing to other women.

However, it is the act of description which is understood to offer the most powerful evidence for these emotional attachments. Berg writes that the 'goods mentioned in bequests were singled out for attention by the individual, and thus endowed with some emotional, familial or material value...The description of commodities was a statement of the emotional quality of connections to

¹² Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 429.

Berg repeats these conclusions in 'Consumption in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain,' 381-82.

¹³ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 2-3, 39; Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods,' 292-94; Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 427-28.

¹⁴ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 421.

particular relatives and friends.’¹⁵ That these things, she continues, were often accorded ‘more detailed description including design, pattern, colour, type of material, [or] “quality,” that is “best,” “second best,” or “everyday” is proof of this, these words conveying ‘some special significance to its recipient.’¹⁶ Pointon too emphasises the importance of description, writing that ‘it is not merely a matter of women leaving small legacies to women friends; it is a question of the naming of women as individuals...the selection of the items appropriate to the person, and the description of those items in a text that functions both as a permanent legal record and as declaration of sentimental attachment.’¹⁷ In the discussions of both Berg and Pointon, people and things seem almost interchangeable. Though she argues that these bequests are evidence of sentimental attachments to people, for example, Pointon also writes that ‘it is as though the owner of the goods seizes this moment to celebrate the particularity of these loved objects, legitimizing the material world by the process of description at the very moment when she contemplates leaving that world.’¹⁸

Though the focus has shifted more recently onto the bequests themselves as vessels for expressing emotional and sentimental attachment, the idea that the act of description provides evidence of this has rarely been put to the test. Indeed, some work builds on Berg and Pointon’s conclusions, but a majority simply repeats them. Looking specifically at clothing, for instance, Miles Lambert argues that bequests were part of the practices of ‘sentimental gifting’ and that the ‘intimacy of bequeathing a garment was an acknowledgement of a highly personal relationship,’ which was important ‘in emotional rather than economic terms.’¹⁹ Ariane Fenntaux similarly states that the gifts of clothing in wills ‘did not fulfil a purely economic function’ but testify to ‘the wide currency of the

¹⁵ Berg, ‘Women’s Consumption and the Industrial Classes,’ 418, 420.

¹⁶ Berg, ‘Women’s Consumption and the Industrial Classes,’ 421, 418.

¹⁷ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40.

¹⁸ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40.

¹⁹ Lambert, ‘Death and Memory,’ 48.

expressive value of textiles,' and Danae Tankard writes that 'testators used their clothing bequests to reinforce ties of love and friendship.'²⁰ Moreover, though emphasis may not be placed directly on the act of description, there remains a tendency in the scholarship to talk about descriptions as 'careful,' 'precise,' or some variation thereof. Lambert, for example, writes that 'a widow in Manchester, Anne, had five daughters, all with bequests *minutely* described [my emphasis].'²¹ This has the effect of investing in these descriptions some significance, implying some special attention by their authors, and this is something we see in the next chapter as well. I argue in both this chapter and chapter two that we therefore need to rethink the kind of language used to talk about description.

The idea that bequests – and in particular women's bequests – are evidence of sentimental attachments therefore remains firmly entrenched in studies of consumer culture, and especially of clothing. This is so much the case, that attempts have been made to extend this argument beyond the widows and single women it is usually associated with. Joanne Bailey, for example, set out to determine whether married women had the 'intense feelings about their possessions' demonstrated in the wills of spinsters and widows.²² She concluded that, despite the law of coverture, married women 'did not entirely suspend their feelings about owning a variety of moveable goods.'²³ Much work has been done to demonstrate that coverture did not always operate in practice as it did in law, and it is well established that women did not suspend their sense of ownership over their possessions during marriage.²⁴ However, tracing

²⁰ Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics,' 134-35; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

²¹ Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 50.

²² Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?,' 354.

²³ Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 356-66.

²⁴ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 365-66

understandings of ownership is different to charting emotion. Men, too, have received renewed attention in the wake of these arguments. Responding to the call from Margot Finn to reintegrate men into studies of the consumer market, Miles Lambert has argued that they 'could be as generous, conscientious and thoughtful consumers as women.' They participated, he writes, in gift giving and bequests of clothing where the 'emotional or sentimental capital invested in the gift...had a deeper significance than mere financial value.'²⁵ Significantly, though they question the emphasis placed on women's experiences, neither Finn nor Lambert examine in detail the claim that women were particularly emotional consumers. Instead, they seek to prove that men *also* felt powerfully about their things.

There have been some rumblings against this reading of wills, but they remain in a small minority. Most recently, Catherine Richardson has questioned whether we can read 'feelings' back into bequests, arguing that 'sentiment does not naturally find a place within the generic constraints of a will.'²⁶ What we *can* look for, she continues, is evidence of the role of objects in early modern 'affect and interconnection,' placing the meanings of these gifts into a historical perspective; this, she argues, is 'a long way from seeing them as freighted with excessive, sentimentalized emotion around death.'²⁷ Lena Cowen Orlin has launched a more vehement attack, arguing that the desire to sentimentalise objects is so entrenched in today's society, 'that it may not occur to us to ask whether it would have been equally foreign for early moderns to sentimentalise them.'²⁸ Indeed, she goes so far as to suggest that bequests of personal possessions were *deliberately* empty of emotion, as 'at the moment of will-

²⁵ Finn, 'Men's Things,' 134; Lambert, 'Small Presents Confirm Friendship,' 24, 31.

²⁶ Richardson, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality,' 52-53.

²⁷ Richardson, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality,' 52-53.

²⁸ Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Empty Vessels' in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012 [2010]), 300.

making the demands of custom and law required [those possessions] to take up again the status of disinterested commodities.’²⁹ In other words, she argues that even if a testator or testatrix *did* have powerful feelings about an object, wills were simply an exercise in unemotional representation. Like Richardson and Cowen Orlin, I am critical of reading emotion into bequests, though it is not my intention to suggest that these bequests were empty of emotion – or, by extension, that women did not feel for their things. Rather, my argument is that bequests of clothing do not offer evidence of this; moreover, I argue that evidence of emotion certainly cannot be found in descriptions of clothing alone. I am also critical of the assumption that the emotions involved in making bequests of clothing were overwhelmingly positive – or ‘sentimental’ or ‘emotional.’ Not only do Mary Braithwait’s unusual probate documents hint at some of the complex motivations which lay behind bequests of clothing, but assumptions that the emotions involved in making bequests were overwhelmingly positive reads into descriptions something that is not there.

The first section of this chapter therefore offers an analysis of clothing bequests in a sample of women’s wills proved by the Dean and Chapter Court of York between 1696 and 1830, in order to challenge arguments that bequests offer evidence of sentimental attachments. Though detailed bequests of clothing – where the testatrix singled out a specific item or items of clothing and bequeathed them to a named individual – have received the most attention from scholars, I demonstrate that this was only one kind of bequest amongst many. Moreover, less than a third of the women in my sample left any kind of clothing bequest at all. Though this section tests claims that women at particular points in the life cycle or social hierarchy were more likely to leave detailed bequests of clothing, it is clear from the sample that women were overwhelmingly more likely to leave any type of clothing bequest to other women than they were to men. And, my analysis also suggests that they

²⁹ Lena Cowen Orlin, ‘Empty Vessels,’ 307.

preferred female custodians and distributors for their clothing. Nevertheless, I argue that this is evidence of a gendered pattern of bequeathing, rather than a sentimental attachment to people or to things.

The second part of the chapter moves to a discussion of 212 newspaper advertisements for lost, dropped, left, stolen, and found clothing (which, for the sake of brevity, I call 'lost and stolen adverts') which were placed in the *Daily Advertiser* between 1731 and 1796.³⁰ Though Jonathon Prude bemoaned in 1991 that the most fundamental aspect of advertisements – their descriptions – had been overlooked by scholars, description has been the focus of increasing interest over the years.³¹ Jonathon Lamb, for example, has argued that the 'exhaustingly descriptive' language of the lost and stolen adverts of the eighteenth century was entirely unnecessary, considering it only in the context of thief-takers, who acted as brokers between thieves and their victims. Lamb states that these descriptions were therefore 'directed to a person who was well acquainted with the object – the thief, who knew perfectly well where the thing was taken and what it looked like.'³² Also writing on description, Jill Campbell argues that in these advertisements it functions to bring the object 'home' to the reader through text, so that it may be literally brought home to its owner.³³ 'It is through detailed, particularizing description,' she writes, that 'a page of newspaper advertisements declares that the personal losses, needs, or wants of individuals – their incompleteness as private selves – may be mended, remedied, or resolved.'³⁴

³⁰ A sample of these advertisements was taken for the years 1731, 1742, 1752, 1760-61, 1772, 1782, and 1796.

³¹ Prude, 'To Look upon the "Lower Sort,"' 126.

³² Jonathon Lamb, 'The Crying of Lost Things,' *ELH*, 71:4 (2004): 955, 950; Jonathon Lamb, *The Things Things Say* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 43.

³³ Jill Campbell, 'Domestic Intelligence: Newspaper Advertising and the Eighteenth-Century Novel,' *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 15:2 (2002): 252.

³⁴ Campbell, 'Domestic Intelligence,' 252.

There are two important things this scholarship shares with that on bequests in women's wills. The first is the way that scholars talk about the act of description, which invests it with deliberation, meaning, and therefore some importance. In Lamb's words it is 'oddly exorbitant,' 'close,' and 'lover-like' in 'the many details lavished on the description of missing articles,' Campbell calls it 'hyper-particularized referential language,' and Prude marvels at the 'extraordinary detail' in which the clothing of runaways was described.³⁵ The second is that, once again, description has been read by some as evidence of emotion in this context; for Campbell, for instance, descriptions allow individuals to declare losses, needs, or wants.³⁶ This link between description and emotion, however, is most explicit in Lamb's work. He argues that the 'superfluous descriptions' found in lost and stolen adverts are 'expressions of desire directed with varying degrees of intensity at what ought to be one's own.' Once stolen, the thing becomes infinitely more enticing than it ever was when in its owner's possession, something which – Lamb argues – is reflected in their descriptions.³⁷ Again, I argue in this section that these descriptions should not be read as evidence of this, not least because authorship of the adverts is difficult to determine. The lost and stolen adverts used a popular language of description which needed to be widely recognised and understood. Rather than being 'exhaustively descriptive,' therefore, advertisers were using a language readily available to them.³⁸

The third and final section in this chapter turns to a comparison between the two sources, and looks at how clothing was described in both. Drawing these two sources together is not unproblematic; one is printed and the other manuscript, they have different geographies, and the two were intended for

³⁵ Lamb, 'The Crying of Lost Things,' 950; Lamb, *The Things Things Say*, 37, 43; Campbell, 'Domestic Intelligence,' 252; Prude, 'To Look upon the "Lower Sort,"' 143.

³⁶ Campbell, 'Domestic Intelligence,' 252.

³⁷ Lamb, 'The Crying of Lost Things,' 959-60; Lamb, *The Things Things Say*, 37-38.

³⁸ Lamb, 'The Crying of Lost Things,' 950.

different purposes, which is reflected in some variations in description across them. Nevertheless, I have made a deliberate decision to look at them in tandem in this section in order to demonstrate that they also have much in common. I have already noted the problematic way scholars tend to talk about the description of clothing – as ‘careful’ or ‘precise’ – and so I deliberately employ the term ‘detailed description’ in the first two chapters of this thesis. By ‘detailed description,’ I refer to Cynthia Sundberg Wall’s definition: ‘detailed description is a sort of itemization, which actually or metaphorically breaks up a whole into distinct, perceptible, and, in some instances, purchasable bits.’³⁹ So, detailed description could range from adding ‘best’ before an item or group of clothing (‘best gown’ or ‘best wearing apparel’), to singling out an individual item of clothing (‘shoes’ or ‘gloves’), or providing information on colour, fabric, or decoration (‘my black quilted petticoat’). In other words, it refers to anything beyond ‘all my wearing apparel.’ This is the type of description which has variously been invested by scholars with attention, care, or emotion.

Some clear differences in description do emerge between the two sources. Wills described an individual’s wardrobe as a whole, while the lost and stolen adverts described something which had been removed from that whole; wills were concerned with the dispersal of property, while the adverts hoped to achieve the polar opposite of this; and the descriptions found in newspaper advertisements were shared much more widely than those found in the pages of a will. However, this final section draws heavily on the work of Sundberg Wall who argues that, as the world of goods continued to expand throughout the eighteenth century, so too did acts of description accumulate across different genres – ‘the world of goods encroached from every direction.’⁴⁰ Not only did detailed description increase across both sources over the century, but these

³⁹ Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 150.

⁴⁰ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 165.

increasing acts of description created a 'common landscape of things' in which eighteenth-century readers were able to recognise 'the local, immediate signs of a shared culture, a shared visual landscape of meaningful, referential detail.'⁴¹ In this section, I demonstrate that the wills and the lost and stolen adverts share a landscape of goods, as well as a widely understood language of 'meaningful referential detail' with which to describe them. This has important implications for the way we interpret the description of clothing, as this was a language which could be used by almost anyone.

The Wills

Most people in the early modern period did not make a will.⁴² Moreover, of those who did, women were a small proportion. Married women rarely wrote wills as they required their husband's permission to do so, and any wills that have survived therefore belong predominantly to widows and single women, or 'spinsters.'⁴³ This has led to conclusions that women at these two stages in the life cycle were uniquely emotional about their clothing. Miles Lambert, for example, has argued that single women in particular demonstrated a 'compulsion' to leave 'bewilderingly complicated lists of bequests...seemingly involving every item in a wardrobe,' reflecting the 'emotional significance of such intimate possessions.'⁴⁴ And, as we have seen, Joanne Bailey has even attempted to reintegrate married women into these conclusions, arguing that they felt just as strongly about their things as did widowed and single women.⁴⁵ This section looks at a sample of the probate records for 530 women, which

⁴¹ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 9.

⁴² Erickson, *Women and Property*, 204.

⁴³ Goose and Evans, 'Wills as an Historical Source', 38.

⁴⁴ Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 54.

See also Lambert, 'Small Presents,' 31.

⁴⁵ Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 365-66.

were proved by the Dean and Chapter Court of York between 1696 and 1830. The probate records which survive for every year between these dates were looked at in order to identify those belonging to women.⁴⁶ This includes women who left wills, as well as those who only had an inventory or declaration presented to the court. This sample reflects this bias towards widowed and single women: around three quarters of the women are identified as widows, whilst just under one fifth are listed as spinsters. Only seven of the 530 women were identified as 'wives,' two as 'gentlewomen,' one as a 'Grass Woman,' and another as a 'Poor Woman.'⁴⁷ It is rare to find women's occupations listed in the probate records, and we are usually only given their status.⁴⁸ However, around seven per cent of the records do not give any of these details at all, although some of these women mention children in their wills.

In the eighteenth century, the Dean and Chapter Court of York had its own peculiar jurisdiction over about fifteen parishes in Yorkshire, fourteen in the City of York, six in Nottinghamshire, and three in Lancashire. These parishes or townships were known as peculiars and were exempt from the authority of the local archdeacon's court, which usually had jurisdictions around the size of a county. The court also exercised probate jurisdiction in other peculiars in the diocese when undertaking a visitation of them.⁴⁹ The sample therefore has a relatively wide geographical reach, which includes both rural and urban areas. It is, however, dominated by records belonging to women who lived, or had previously lived, in York. Of the overall sample, over a third of the records list a York parish as the deceased's address. The sample also excludes the very richest

⁴⁶ Wills proved for the years 1714, 1747, and 1757 are with the records of the Exchequer Court. 'Guide to Probate Courts,' Borthwick Institute for Archives; BOR, D&C Court, microform, reels 1249-1259, Probate records 1696-1830.

⁴⁷ Martha Stoobard is identified as both a 'midwife' and widow. BOR, D&C Court, reel 1249, Martha Stoobard, February 1702.

⁴⁸ Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture*, 167.

⁴⁹ 'Guide to Probate Courts,' Borthwick Institute for Archives.

at one end of the scale and, at the other, the very poorest. Those with property in more than one diocese had their probate proved in one of the two Prerogative Courts of Canterbury and York, while it was unlikely – but not impossible – that those living in poverty would leave behind probate records.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the sample is representative of what Amy Erickson terms ‘ordinary people,’ which encompasses ‘everyone who was not aristocratic or gentry on the one hand, nor in chronic poverty on the other.’ Or, in other words, around seventy to eighty per cent of the population.⁵¹

401 of these 530 women left wills, three quarters of which belong to widows, who are represented in the same proportion as in the overall sample. Spinsters, in a slightly higher proportion, make up twenty-one per cent of the women who left wills. Five of the seven ‘wives’ in the sample left wills, as did both the ‘gentlewomen.’ The status of just over three per cent of the women who left wills is unknown. Out of the 401 wills, only 127 – or less than a third – mentioned clothing in some way; this included women bequeathing a list of individual items of clothing to specific individuals, women leaving their ‘wearing apparel’ or ‘clothes’ to a specific person or persons, women requesting that their clothing be sold to cover their final debts and funeral expenses, widows bequeathing their late husband’s clothing, and women leaving gifts of gloves and scarves, as well as gifts of money with an instruction that the recipient was to use it to buy gloves or mourning clothes. Though she left her daughter ‘all my Cloase,’ for example, the widow Everilda Harris also left ‘John Looke & Elizabeth his wife Each of them five shillings to by them gloves.’⁵² And, the widow Mary Kellet left her son Thomas ‘all my Deceased husbands Close therein.’⁵³ At almost half, the number of women who mentioned clothing in their wills is again dominated by those from York. York was a large town, and it is estimated that its

⁵⁰ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, 169.

⁵¹ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 14.

⁵² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Everilda Harris, July 1718.

⁵³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Mary Kellet, April 1723.

population remained steady at about 12,000 for the first sixty years of the eighteenth century, and then increased by more than one-third between 1760 and 1800.⁵⁴ Its dominance in the sample is therefore unsurprising.

West Stockwith in Nottinghamshire and the parish of Boston and Clifford Bramham in West Yorkshire appear second most frequently in the sample, with each making up around eight per cent of the total. In contrast to the huge population of York, it is estimated that the township of Boston and Clifford only had 1566 inhabitants by 1848. The township had experienced recent growth in the eighteenth century as a result of the discovery of a mineral spring in 1744, and it is only towards the second half of the century that it begins to appear in the sample.⁵⁵ The wills also include women from villages and townships much smaller than Boston and Clifford, for example Burton Pidsea in East Yorkshire and Stokeham in Nottinghamshire, albeit in a much smaller proportion. One woman, Ann Bleshell, came from the small agricultural village of Burton Pidsea, and died in 1747; at around the time of her death, forty-four families were said to live in the village, and its population in 1801 was only 272.⁵⁶ Similarly, Jane Byron was the only woman in the sample to come from Stokeham, and died in 1761, though her will was signed in 1748.⁵⁷ In 1848, Stokeham still had only forty nine inhabitants.⁵⁸ Although the sample shows a strong bias towards York, it therefore also grants glimpses into the lives of women from these smaller rural villages and townships.

⁵⁴ P.M. Tillott, *A History of the County of York: The City of York* (London: Victoria County History, 1961), 207-15.

⁵⁵ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (London, 1848), 632-35, 309-14.

⁵⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Ann Bleshell, September 1747; Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, 224-29.

⁵⁷ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Jane Byron, June 1761.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, 224-29.

In the wills where women do make some mention of clothing, we sometimes find detailed descriptions which resemble the bequests Berg and Pointon point to. In her 1763 will Ruth Tennyson, a spinster of York, left a long list of clothing which was bequeathed to various female family members and friends. This list included

one Green Damask Petticoat, two white Dimmity petticoats one striped Muslin apron one Cambrick apron, four white Cloth aprons Six double Muslin Handkerchiefs Six Shifts with Tuckers to them Six pair of Sleeves three pair of Cambrick Ruffles, one Cape Gown and all my best Day Caps...a red Lutestring Night Gown a pair of new Stays four double Muslin Handkerchiefs and two Kentish Handkerchiefs Six single Handkerchiefs three white cloth aprons a black Silk Cloak my best black petticoat and a red Camblet Cloak and Hood...⁵⁹

By describing these individual items of clothing, Tennyson broke up the whole of her wardrobe into distinct and perceptible bits.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, though this kind of clothing bequest has received the most attention from scholars, it was only one type amongst many.⁶¹ A number of women simply bequeathed their 'wearing apparel,' 'wearing Close,' or 'wearing Cloths' to individuals or to several persons.⁶² Inventories drawn up after the death of the testatrix listing individual items of clothing appear extremely infrequently, but many appraisers used a similar category of 'purse and apparel' or 'wearing apparel' to value the deceased's clothing.⁶³

'Wearing apparel' therefore appears as a generic category (and was used for both men and women), but in the first half of the century a distinction between 'woollen' and 'linen' clothing also emerges in the wills. Hannah Wilson left a

⁵⁹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1254, Ruth Tennyson, January 1764.

⁶⁰ Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 150.

⁶¹ For example, Dolly MacKinnon has examined charitable bequests of clothing in the wills of middling class women.

MacKinnon, "Charity is worth it when it looks that good," 93.

⁶² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Elinor Moore, December 1714; reel 1250, Everilda Harris, July 1718; reel 1251, Elizabeth Blount, December 1734.

⁶³ Overton et al., *Production and consumption in English households*, 13-14.

Hannah Harrison ‘all my Cloths both Linnen & woollen,’ Anne Gibson left her two daughters Ellin and Mary ‘all Cloaths both Woollen and Linning,’ and Isabel Halliday bequeathed Ann Mirds ‘all me wareing apparill both wollen & lining.’⁶⁴ ‘Linens’ could and, as we will see in chapter four, did refer to household furnishings like tablecloths, napkins, blankets and sheets, but this category also referred to clothing like shifts, caps, aprons, and handkerchiefs. Dorothy Wright, for instance, left to her daughter Elizabeth Farand ‘all my Wearing apparel (both woollen & Linnen),’ and to Anne Wilks ‘Blankets & sheets & all my Linnen (Except such part thereof as is before given to the said Elizabeth Farand).’⁶⁵ These more general bequests have not been read in the same way as those with detailed description, with scholars often assuming that, in contrast to bequests of individual items, they served a primarily economic function.⁶⁶ Some women did clearly specify that their clothing was to be sold in order to pay final debts, probate and funeral expenses, or to cover the cost of monetary bequests made in their will. Both Beverly Lemire and John Styles have emphasised the economic value of clothes, arguing that a ‘stock’ of clothing functioned as a source of currency in itself – a ‘wardrobe could be the equivalent to a savings account,’ writes Lemire.⁶⁷ A thriving second-hand clothing trade ensured a ready market, and the clothing of the deceased was often sold ‘en masse.’⁶⁸ However, many women left no such instruction, and it is therefore impossible to determine whether a bequest was intended purely as an economic measure. There was no single approach to bequeathing clothing and, indeed, it is more than likely that some women – like Mary Braithwait – made arrangements for it which were not outlined in their wills.

⁶⁴ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Hannah Wilson, March 1721/2; reel 1251, Mary Kellett, April 1732; reel 1251, Anne Gibson, October 1729; reel 1251, Isabel Halleday, May 1729.

⁶⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Dorothy Wright, October 1749.

⁶⁶ Lambert, ‘Death and Memory,’ 46.

⁶⁷ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 145; Styles, ‘Custom or Consumption?’ 107.

⁶⁸ Lambert, ‘Cast-off Wearing Apparell,’ 2.

Amy Erickson writes that the 'evident care with which willmakers – especially poor willmakers – detailed their bequests, down to the names of cows, the location of a particular table or who slept in a certain bed, and the colour of breeches and petticoats' is indicative of the importance of moveable goods for people who owned little land.⁶⁹ Were poorer women therefore more likely to leave detailed descriptions in their wills than those higher up the social scale? Estimating wealth from probate records is notoriously difficult, and any values must be taken with a pinch of salt. Although an inventory was only required if the deceased's estate was worth more than £5, smaller estates *were* appraised, albeit much less frequently.⁷⁰ For instance, although the only 'poor woman' identified in the sample – Elizabeth Taylor of Laneham in Nottinghamshire – did not leave a will, an inventory of her goods drawn up in 1711 lists only 'her Clothes, Praised' at 1s 6d. This may suggest that, as a 'poor woman,' Taylor's most valuable (or even only) possession was her clothing.⁷¹ Although, as I have already suggested, wills largely exclude the experiences of the very poorest members of society, it is possible to identify a range of incomes amongst the women in the sample using the probate inventories left alongside wills.⁷² Out of the 127 women who mentioned clothing in their wills, eighty-nine also had an inventory or declaration from which it was possible to broadly estimate wealth. However, this is not unproblematic as inventoried wealth and the actual wealth of the deceased were rarely the same thing. Firstly, only moveable goods – as opposed to lands or dwelling houses – are included. For instance, the total value of the 1728 inventory of Joan Wigglesworth was £2 15s, but in her will she was able to bequeath a 'house & Tenement' in Goodramgate, York.⁷³ In addition, the debts owed to and by the deceased, as well as their funeral expenses, were

⁶⁹ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 64.

See also Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

⁷⁰ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 33.

⁷¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Elizabeth Taylor, December 1711.

⁷² Goose and Evans, 'Wills as an Historical Source,' 45.

⁷³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Joan Wigglesworth, November 1728.

listed. Finally, as Mark Overton et al point out, as the purpose of an inventory was often to raise enough money to pay the deceased's final debts, some appraisers may simply have stopped once they had recorded a sufficient total value.⁷⁴

We can observe the shortcomings inherent in inventoried wealth by looking at the 1725 inventory of Elizabeth Wright of Brotherton, which is rare in that it lists debts owed to the deceased; at £5 14s they make up a significant proportion of the £5 19s total (her 'purse and apparel' was only appraised at 5s).⁷⁵ In the majority of inventories, we are therefore given only a partial estimation of an individual's wealth. Declarations, which increasingly replaced inventories from the 1780s onwards, are even more unreliable. In these documents, the 'exhibitants' of the deceased's probate declared that 'to the best of their Knowledge and belief' the personal estate and effects of the deceased 'would not amount to' a certain sum. For example, Rosamond Goodall, spinster of Bramham, appears to be the richest woman in the sample as the value of her personal estate and effects 'did not amount to' £5000 in 1804, but no specific value is given beyond this.⁷⁶ Finally, although they were executed *after* the death of the testatrix, bequests were written by her during her lifetime, while inventories and declarations were compiled by others once it had ended. There is therefore an uncertain relationship between the two, as the personal wealth of the testatrix – as well her possessions – may have been subject to change between the time in which her will was signed and her death. Indeed, I suggest in the final section of this chapter that some women may have taken this into account in the wording of their bequests.

⁷⁴ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, 15.

⁷⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Elizabeth Wright, May 1725.

⁷⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Rosamond Goodall, February 1804.

Despite the shortcomings inherent in estimating wealth from probate records, I would argue that it was not possible to discern a difference in the way bequests of clothing were made according to inventoried wealth. Women were grouped according to the values taken from their inventories or declarations; Table 1 shows the distribution of wealth across the sample taken from the values of probate inventories, while Table 2 shows estimated wealth from the declarations attached to wills from the 1780s onwards. There is a clear difference between these two tables, the most significant of which is that the declarations record much larger estimates of wealth; three women were recorded as having personal estates which 'did not amount to more than' £1000, for instance, while the highest inventoried wealth in the sample was that of Elizabeth Flower, whose estate was valued at £380 10s.⁷⁷ The inventories also suggest a concentration on women with estates valued at the lower end of this scale, as thirty-three of these thirty-eight women were worth less than £100. In contrast, just under half the women for whom declarations survive were worth less than £100. There could be a number of reasons for this. First, this might simply reflect inflation as the pound more than halved in value between 1700 and 1800.⁷⁸ Second, the declaration process worked in a different way to that of the probate inventory, and may have taken into account more than the individual's moveable goods – for example, by considering the value of their property, investments, and debts owed as well. Finally, the declarations are by no means a clear guide to the value of an individual's estate, as they only state that it 'did not amount to more than' a certain amount. Nevertheless, both Tables 1 and 2 show that the sample of wills reflects a range of women from

⁷⁷ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Elizabeth Flower, July 1803.

⁷⁸ 'Currency converter: 1270-2017,' The National Archives (accessed 03/05/18)

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>

Table 1. Inventoried wealth attached to the wills, 1699-1803.⁷⁹

Total value of inventory	Number of women
£0 – 5	7
£6 – 10	6
£11 – 20	9
£21 – 30	3
£31 – 40	2
£41 – 50	
£51 – 60	
£61 – 70	2
£71 – 80	1
£81 – 90	2
£91 – 100	1
£100 – 110	
£111 – 120	
£121 – 130	1
£131 – 140	1
£141 – 150	2
£351 – 400	1
	TOTAL: 38

⁷⁹ Though declarations replaced inventories from the 1790s onwards in the sample, one inventory survives for the year 1803 for Elizabeth Flower of Misterton, Nottinghamshire.

Table 2. Wealth taken from the declarations attached to the wills, 1781-1821.

Estimated value of declaration	Number of women
> £5	2
> £15	1
> £20	5
> £40	3
> £80	1
> £90	1
> £100	13
> £150	1
> £200	4
> £300	8
> £350	1
> £500	1
> £600	3
> £700	1
> £1000	3
> £2000	1
> £4000	1
> £5000	1
	TOTAL: 51

across the social hierarchy, though women with estates worth less than £100 predominate. Two thirds of the personal estate and effects of these eighty-nine women was valued at less than £100, with forty-two per cent valued at less than £50. The estates of twenty-two per cent of these women was valued at between £101 and £500, eight per cent at between £501 and £1000, and, finally, three per cent at between £1000 and £5000. As I have said, Rosamond Goodall of Boston in Bramham was apparently the wealthiest woman, while Ann Lancaster, also from Bramham, had an inventoried wealth of £3 5s in 1721 making her the poorest; in her will Lancaster left her daughter 'all wearing apparel,' and Goodall similarly bequeathed 'Linen' and 'Wearing Apparel.'⁸⁰

The geography of the sample of women shown in Tables 1 and 2 echoes that of the overall sample, with over forty per cent belonging to parishes in York. Unsurprisingly, York also saw the largest concentration of women with estates estimated at less than £20, while the majority of women from York were worth less than £100. This suggests a range of women, spanning from those who relied on their labour to survive to members of the middling classes, though there were also women from further up the social hierarchy. Three women from York were worth between £650 and £700 and two between £950 and £4000. These women may have been approaching gentry status, but it is likely that most gentry women with estates worth more than this had their probate proved in the Prerogative Courts. The second place which appears most frequently in the sample is of Bramham in West Yorkshire, with eleven of the eighty-nine women belonging to this parish. Although the poorest woman in the sample lived in Bramham, it was also apparently the richest. While four women from the parish were worth less than £100, seven were worth between £200 and £5000. Two of the richest women in the sample – the widow Mary Assheton and Rosamond Goodall – lived in Boston in Bramham, though those living in Clifford were more

⁸⁰ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Ann Lancaster, October 1721; reel 1257, Rosamond Goodall, February 1804.

likely to be worth less than £20. Bramham is followed by the village of West Stockwith in Nottinghamshire, where a majority of women were worth less than £100 (but all were worth more than £50). The remaining villages, townships, and parishes had fewer than four women in the sample, and often only one or two. In these places, women were most often worth less than £100, and their estates were usually valued at less than £20; for example, the estate of Elinor Parker of Cockfishall in Kirby Ireleth was valued at £8 14s in 1728.⁸¹ Women in these smaller, more rural areas were most likely to rely on their labour to survive.

Some women from across the scale of wealth shown in Tables 1 and 2 bequeathed all their wearing apparel or linen rather than leaving specific bequests of clothing; Dorothy Wright of Brotherton in the County of York, worth £9 10s, bequeathed 'all my wearing apparel both wollen & Linnen,' and Elinor Moore of York, worth £14 12s 9d, also left 'all my wearing apparel' to her servant.⁸² Agnes Hinde of Bramham, whose personal estate and effects 'did not amount to' £100, asked that her 'wearing apparel [be] disposed of by the said Elizabeth and Margaret my daughters at their own discretion.'⁸³ In contrast, other women left more detailed bequests; Anne Coltart, widow of York – whose inventory was valued at £5 5s 9d – left her niece ten shillings and 'my Callimanco Gown and my Sarcenett hudd.'⁸⁴ Mary Crown of Kirkby Ireleth, worth £9 8s, left a long list of clothing bequests, including 'My worst Stampd linning Gown and worst Black Petticoat,' 'my Best Stays,' 'my Best Black Quilt Petticoat,' and an 'ould blue Petticoat.'⁸⁵ Mabel Woodburn, also from the parish of Kirkby Ireleth, had an inventoried wealth of £91 and bequeathed, amongst other things, her

⁸¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Elinor Parker, March 1728.

⁸² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Dorothy Wright, October 1749; reel 1250, Elinor Moore, December 1714.

⁸³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Agnes Hinde, March 1799.

⁸⁴ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Anne Coltart, January 1730/31.

⁸⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Crown, May 1783.

‘best white apron,’ ‘a black Gown,’ and her ‘best Blue cloak.’⁸⁶ And, Elizabeth Ellison of York, whose personal estate and effects ‘did not amount’ to £600, left ‘a black Silk Gown, and Petticoat, my best Cap, fine Apron, double Ruffles, best neck Handkerchief’ to her sister, as well as several other bequests of clothing.⁸⁷ Though Erickson suggests that poor willmakers were especially likely to leave detailed bequests, some of the poorest women in the sample *did* leave them, but some did not.⁸⁸ Similarly, some of the richest women left detailed bequests, and some did not. Though the nature of these bequests may have been different – for example, bequests of ‘all my wearing apparel’ made by wealthy women were likely to be larger than those made by the poorer women in the sample – no distinctive pattern emerges in the way in which these bequests were articulated.

If wealth appeared to have little impact on the way in which women left bequests of clothing, did their stage in the life cycle hold any influence? Miles Lambert has argued that it did, writing that single and childless women were more likely to leave ‘bewilderingly complicated lists of bequests.’⁸⁹ Although relatively small in number, the wills looked at in this chapter do suggest that, in relation to the overall sample of women, single women may have been more predisposed than widows to mention clothing in some way. Spinsters made up around one fifth of the 401 women who left wills, but this increased to nearly one third in the context of the 127 women whose wills mention clothing. In contrast, though they made up three quarters of the overall sample of wills, only two thirds of those who mentioned clothing were widows. Though this does not suggest a dramatic surge in the proportion of single women who bequeathed clothing, as widows continued to dominate, it may lend some weight to the argument that the wills of spinsters were more likely to mention clothing in

⁸⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1256, Mabel Woodburn, January 1788.

⁸⁷ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1256, Elizabeth Ellison, January 1794.

⁸⁸ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 64.

⁸⁹ Lambert, ‘Death and Memory,’ 54.

some way. Were spinsters therefore also more likely, as Lambert suggests, to leave detailed descriptions? Again, description acts in his argument as evidence of emotion; Lambert frames the 'detailed wills' written by single women as a desire to engender a sense of gratitude amongst friends and wider family members, thereby 'nurturing feelings of remembrance.'⁹⁰ However, in my sample spinsters and widows were *both* more likely to leave general bequests of clothing than provide detailed description between 1696 and 1750, and, up until the 1722 will of 'gentlewoman' Elizabeth Browne, detailed description was largely confined to singling out an item or items of clothing ('a pair of shoes,' for example.) Browne left her daughter 'my Lutestring Coate and my best Stayes and my best Cloake and hood.'⁹¹ In this period, a much higher number of widows left detailed descriptions than did spinsters, which reflects their overall dominance in the sample.

This did change, however, in the second half of the century. As we will see in the third section of this chapter, between 1750 and 1800 there was a dramatic overall rise in both the frequency and level of detailed description in the wills. In these fifty years, the majority of clothing bequests *did* contain some detailed description, and spinsters made up almost half of the women who left this type of bequest.⁹² Nevertheless, between 1800 and 1830, when detailed description in all of the wills decreased dramatically, widows again left the majority of detailed bequests. What can this tell us? Well, it is clear that in the period 1750 to 1800 single women *were* likely to include detailed description in their wills, although widows also continued to do so. This was, however, a period in which detailed description in the wills increased overall. Therefore – though they may have been more likely to leave bequests of clothing – there is no clear link between single women and detailed description across the century. Moreover,

⁹⁰ Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 55.

⁹¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Elizabeth Browne, October 1724.

⁹² The twenty-eight detailed bequests left between 1750-1800 were made by fourteen widows, thirteen spinsters, and one 'wife.'

the final part of this chapter will demonstrate that we cannot make the argument for a more emotional engagement with clothing based on these descriptions. If spinsters were more likely to leave bequests of clothing, this reflects not a disproportionate sentimental investment, but is more likely to be indicative of their status as unmarried women. As chapters two and four will demonstrate, single women – and especially older single women – occupied a precarious position in society, were often financially far less well off than their married counterparts, and rarely headed their own households. Detailed descriptions do not tell us that spinsters were more emotional about their clothing than widowed women. Rather, I would argue that these women were simply bequeathing the items they had access to and, in many instances, clothing and moveable household goods would have formed the bulk of their possessions.

So, why have women's wills been understood to provide such powerful evidence of emotion, and especially of sentiment? This of course has its roots in the scholarship of the 1990s, which argued for a powerful emotional investment by women in their possessions.⁹³ And, as we have seen, in the context of a will this emotional investment has been largely understood to rest in the detailed description of bequests. However, these arguments also stem from the fact that women *did* leave more bequests of clothing than did men, and were also more likely to leave detailed descriptions of this clothing. This was not unique to the eighteenth century, as the same pattern has been observed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wills.⁹⁴ Women were also overwhelmingly more likely to leave these bequests of clothing to other women rather than to the men in their

⁹³ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes'; Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*; Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods'; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 191-93.

⁹⁴ Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies, 'What Essex man wore: an investigation into Elizabethan dress recorded in wills 1558 to 1603' in *Textiles and Text*, 19; Mary Hodges, 'Widows of the "Middling Sort" and their Assets in Two Seventeenth-Century Towns' in *When Death Do Us Part*, 317.

lives. Around ninety per cent of the women in the sample left their bequests of clothing to one or more female friend, family member, or acquaintance, though this does not mean that male relatives, friends, or even creditors did not inherit women's clothing. A testatrix often simply left 'all the remainder of my goods and chattels' or 'all the rest and residue of my Estate' to male executors, who were often brothers, sons, and nephews.⁹⁵ Though she left her niece 'my Callimanco Gown and my Sarcenett hudd,' Anne Coltart left 'all the rest and residue of my goods chattels plate Money rights and Demands whatsoever' to her brother in law.⁹⁶ Mary Elton left 'all my personal Estate (my Wearing apparell Excepted)' to William Storrs, Frances Storrs, and their mother, as she had bequeathed her 'Wearing apparell' separately; this suggests that we can assume that clothing could easily form part of the 'rest and residue' of goods left to male executors.⁹⁷ Dorothy Atkinson made no mention of clothing in her will, but listed in an inventory of her goods after her decease were various items of clothing including 'a Gown,' 'a Womens Coat,' 'a Cloak and Hood,' 'a Coat and petty coat,' 'a Silk Coat & petty coat,' and 'a Cloak and a Gown' all of which were apparently found 'In Thomas Shutts Chamber.' Dorothy left the same Thomas Shutt 'all ye Remainder of my Goods and Personal Estate' – which presumably included these items of clothing – and appointed him as her executor.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, it is clear that if a testatrix did decide to leave a bequest of clothing in her will, she was probably going to name another woman as the beneficiary. This has also had a strong influence on interpretations of bequests as evidence of sentimental engagement. As we have seen, scholars have attempted to argue that men *also* felt powerfully about their things, and

⁹⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Jane Richmond, November 1711; reel 1251, Mary Wilmer, October 1732.

⁹⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Anne Coltart, January 1730/1.

⁹⁷ BOR, D&C, reel 1251, Mary Elton, March 1728/9.

⁹⁸ BOR, reel 1251, Dorothy Atkinson, October 1728.

expressed emotion through gifts and bequests to other men.⁹⁹ However, the evidence is not there to suggest that bequests were about emotion or sentiment for women, or, by extension, for men. The fact that women were more likely than men to leave bequests of clothing is evidence of what Amy Erickson usefully calls ‘personalism,’ rather than reflecting a heightened emotional engagement. Erickson writes that women did not distribute smaller gifts like clothing among more people because they had wider kinship and friendship networks than men, but because they were ‘freer, by the nature of their property and of their concerns, to express personal preference.’¹⁰⁰ This ‘personalism,’ she continues, is reflective of the difference between matrimony and patrimony; while patrimony suggested ‘property extended vertically or longitudinally through time,’ matrimony ‘implies ties of kinship – and therefore of property – extended horizontally, or latitudinally, in a much more immediate time frame.’¹⁰¹ Of course, while women may have been ‘freer’ than men to express personal preference in their wills, in a sense this was the result of restriction. For some women – and especially single women – moveable goods may have simply formed the bulk of the assets available to them. Put simply, while men’s wills were largely concerned with the transfer of property down a patrilineal line, women were more likely to disperse moveable goods to a wider range of (often female) family, friends, and acquaintances.¹⁰²

Sisters, cousins, and nieces appeared as frequent recipients in the wills of spinsters, who also named a number of women who were probably friends and acquaintances – for example, Ruth Tennyson left bequests to Miss Nancy Carter,

⁹⁹ Finn, ‘Men’s Things,’ 134; Lambert, ‘Small Presents Confirm Friendship,’ 24, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 213-25.

See also Alexandra Shepard, ‘Minding their own business: Married women and credit in early eighteenth-century London,’ *Transactions of the RHS*, 25 (2015): 64; Vickery, ‘Women and the world of goods,’ 294.

¹⁰¹ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 213-25.

¹⁰² Erickson, *Women and Property*, 213-25.

Miss Betty Wilks, Mrs Martha Earle, and a Mrs Dickinson, who she named as her landlady.¹⁰³ Aunts and mothers sometimes appeared, but much less frequently than did other female relatives (most likely because they were no longer alive). The wills of widowed women are similar, but also, unsurprisingly, include daughters, daughters-in-law, and granddaughters. These were women who already had some established relationship with the testatrix, but the 1783 will of Mary Musgrave suggests that bequests might also anticipate future relationships; in it, she left 'the best part of my Cloaths and Wearing Apparel' to her two granddaughters, and the 'worst part' to the wife of her 'said Son in Law Philip Musgrave.' However, where his wife's name should be written there is instead only a blank space. Although it is impossible to know for certain, perhaps Philip had not yet married when Mary wrote her will, and so she left room to insert a name at a later date. When she died in 1787, however, it was still left blank.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, we can see gendered practices of bequeathing at work here, as women left clothing to a circle of female family members, friends, and acquaintances. But, this cannot be read as evidence of any real or authentic emotion on the part of the testatrix or the recipient of the bequest. Instead, it simply shows us that this was the established – and perhaps even expected – pattern of bequests.

Though Mary Musgrave's will is unusual in the context of familial relationships, a number of women seem to have made similar provisions when making bequests to servants. Female servants were the regular recipients of clothing across the century and, in some instances, it is clear that the testatrix was referring to a servant already in her employ; for example, in 1731 the York spinster Elizabeth Blount left 'all my wering cloths' and a year's wages to buy mourning to her maid, provided she was still in her service at the time of her death.¹⁰⁵ In other

¹⁰³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1254, Ruth Tennyson, January 1764.

¹⁰⁴ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1256, Mary Musgrave, November 1787.

¹⁰⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Elizabeth Blount, December 1734.

cases, however, the testatrix simply bequeathed clothing to the servants who would be in her employ at the time of her death. Mary Heddon, widow of York, left all the wearing apparel that had not already been disposed of 'to my own Maid Servant, who shall be living with me at my Decease' in 1781.¹⁰⁶ In 1811, Elizabeth Preston, a spinster of York, similarly left 'the least valuable part of my wardrobe to the female servants who shall be living in the house at my decease,' but left it 'to the discretion of my mother and my said sisters...what part is to be so considered.'¹⁰⁷

Amanda Vickery has shown that, over and above payment, 'goods were part of the currency of the mistress-servant relationship' as servants could expect to be gifted their mistress's discarded clothing.¹⁰⁸ Bequests of clothing were an extension of this, and suggest an established sense of obligation – especially as some women appear to have made provisions for a change of staff between the signing of their will and their death. This was not an entirely one-sided relationship, however; Elizabeth Blount specified that her maid servant had to remain in her employ in order to receive this bequests, while Sarah Wade – a widow of York – left her 'Inferior Clothing' to her servants 'if deserving of them.'¹⁰⁹ Executrices were entrusted with the dispersal of clothing to servants, as well as with determining the appropriate level of bequest. In her 1737 will Elizabeth Thompson, for example, left her servant 'my wearing lining & such other wearing apparel as my executrix shall think fit.'¹¹⁰ Whether or not a testatrix really did feel a sense of obligation to provide her servant or servants with clothing is unknowable. What is significant, however, is that a number of women did, reflecting a culture of material obligation and entitlement surrounding the relationship between servant and mistress. This is something we

¹⁰⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1256, Mary Heddon, March 1782.

¹⁰⁷ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1258, Elizabeth Preston, October 1811.

¹⁰⁸ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 184.

¹⁰⁹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Sarah Wade, November 1798.

¹¹⁰ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1252, Elizabeth Thompson, November 1742.

will also see in chapter two, as mistresses purchased clothing for servants living in their households.

The sample of wills also suggests that, as well as being the primary recipients of clothing bequests, women were the preferred guardians and distributors of them. It was often the executrix who was charged with the care and proper dispersal of clothing according to the testatrix's wishes, but other family members and friends were also left the task. In the 1712 will of Mary Dawson, a spinster who lived in York, are the following instructions:

I give unto Edith Mountains the wife of Abraham Mountains of the City of York Barber Chyurgian One smale Trunk marked M:D: with all the Cloaths & other things which shall be found therein & of which there shall be a schedule therein at the time of my death Upon this Speciall Trust & Confidence nevertheless that the Said Edith Mountains do give & dispose of what shall be found in the said Trunk at my decease & also the Sd. Trunk unto my Neece Mary Fenton...at such times & after such a manner as the Said Edith shall think fitting & convenient betwixt her & the Sd. Mary's attaining the age of one & twenty or Marriage.¹¹¹

In 1762 Jane Horncastle, also a York spinster, similarly left her 'wearing apparell' in the hands of her trustees to be given to five female members of the Pinder family 'Occasionally as they shall see proper and Convenient after the death of my sd. Brother.'¹¹² Mary Holdsworth, widow of Bramham, also requested in her 1770 will that her executors deliver 'all my wearing apparel' 'unto the care and keeping of Mrs Sarah Smith...or Mrs Ann Wilkinson...and I desire they, or one of them, will dispose of them as equally as they can amongst my Children Susannah, Ann, and Mary Holdsworth, as they...shall see occasions may need.'¹¹³ Mary Dawson's emphasis on the 'Speciall Trust & Confidence' placed in Edith Mountains, as well as Mary Holdsworth's request that the two named women 'care' and 'keep' her clothing until they felt that her children had need of it suggest that this may have been understood to be a feminine skill. As well as

¹¹¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1250, Mary Dawson, June 1713.

¹¹² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1254, Jane Horncastle, October 1762.

¹¹³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Holdsworth, March 1779.

storing it correctly, these women were given instructions to judge when the recipient of the bequest was in need. This was left largely to their own discretion. Significantly, Mary Dawson later stipulated in her will that if the said Edith Mountains happened to die before she could undertake her custodianship, the trunk with clothing in was to be passed directly to her niece's father who should then distribute it to her as he felt fit. Rather than passing it directly to him, Dawson appears to have first preferred a female caretaker.¹¹⁴

As we can see, there *was* a strong association between women and bequests of clothing, and scholars have used this to lend weight to claims that these bequests are evidence of emotion. I have argued that these bequests cannot be read in this way; however, these arguments also stem from assumptions about the nature of the documents themselves. As we will see in the next chapter, detailed description in account books has been interpreted as evidence of emotion by scholars who argue that these documents are otherwise unemotional. However, wills – which deal with death and delineate personal relationships – are seen as inherently emotional sources. Moreover, these emotions are often conceived of as largely positive. Writing on the history of emotions, for example, Peter Burke has argued that court proceedings which show personal relationships which 'went wrong' should be supplemented by documents like wills, which 'express the emotions associated with more harmonious relationships.'¹¹⁵ The scholarship on women and clothing has overwhelmingly similarly assumed that bequests of clothing, and especially those with detailed description, are associated with positive emotions about people or things on the part of the testatrix (and often on that of the recipient). But, by leaving instruction on the fate of the deceased's personal estate in order to avoid confusion or competing claims, wills also acknowledge potential for dispute. Once again, the unusual probate records of Mary Braithwait suggest

¹¹⁴ BOR, D&C Court, 1250, Mary Dawson, June 1713.

¹¹⁵ Peter Burke, 'Is There a Cultural History of the Emotions?' in *Representing Emotions*, 39.

that the motivations which lay behind bequests of clothing could be complex, and may even hint at a disharmonious relationship with her sister Kitty. In any case it is clear that, while she did leave detailed bequests to other women, her wills and codicils were also intended to ensure that Kitty was not the recipient of any of her clothing.¹¹⁶ Moreover, she asks that preference be given to 'Grace in particular' when her executors disposed of her linen and wearing apparel, and ensures that the 'helpless' Grace may have anything she 'wants making or mending' after her death.¹¹⁷

In the absence of extraordinarily expansive probate records like Mary Braithwait's, we can never know the motivations – much less the feelings – which lay behind bequests of clothing. Unfortunately, very few women recorded *why* it was that they wanted an individual to inherit a specific item or items of clothing. Moreover, there is no way of knowing what actually happened to the clothing bequeathed. A gap of a few years, and sometimes even longer, between the signing of a will and the death of the testatrix was not unusual, though some wills seem to have made provision for this. A grant of probate issued after an individual's death gave an executor or executrix permission to begin administering the deceased's estate as per the instructions in their will, but this was only the start of what could be a lengthy process.¹¹⁸ Whether or not the intended recipient of a bequest ever received the clothing is almost impossible to determine, as is what they did with it. Though testatrixes sometimes explicitly requested that their clothing be sold, it is not unlikely that bequests were pawned or sold even when the recipient had received no such instruction. These bequests therefore do not give us evidence of authentic emotion, but they do show us gendered practices of bequeathing in operation.

¹¹⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

¹¹⁷ BOR, D&C, reel 1255, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

¹¹⁸ Arkell, 'The Probate Process,' 9-10.

The Daily Advertiser

Even a cursory glance at the lost and stolen adverts placed in eighteenth-century newspapers reveals similarities with the detailed descriptions found in women's wills. The two sources deal with property in very different ways, but both also speak to the transitory nature of ownership; in bequeathing her clothing the testatrix acknowledges a future owner, while in a lost and stolen advert an advertiser publicly declares that – though they are the owner – they no longer have the item or items in their possession. And, again, detailed description has been by some read as emotional in this context. In describing an item in an advertisement, it has been argued, the advertiser loudly declares their desire to get it back.¹¹⁹ This section is based on an analysis of 212 of these adverts, taken from 1,012 issues of the *Daily Advertiser* published between 1731 and 1796. These issues are available through the 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Database, and a sample was taken for roughly every ten years between 1731 and 1796, although for some of these years the number of surviving issues is low. The years 1731, 1772, and 1796 offer the most complete sets.¹²⁰ The lost and stolen adverts in each of these issues were read for those which mention women's clothing, and I have included adverts describing women's clothing which had been lost, dropped, left, stolen, found, or stopped. As in many of the wills looked at in this chapter, a number of lost and stolen adverts simply list 'wearing apparel' or 'linen,' and so have not been included in the sample if it is not possible to determine whether they were describing women's clothing.

¹¹⁹ Lamb, 'The Crying of Lost Things,' 959-60; Lamb, *The Things Things Say*, 37-38.

¹²⁰ 261 issues survive in the 18th and 19th Century Burney Collection Database for 1731; eighty-two for 1742; thirty-three for 1752; eight for 1760-61; 296 for 1772; twenty-three for 1782; and 309 for 1796.

The *Daily Advertiser* – ‘the first modern newspaper’ – was a London publication founded in 1730, and contained a combination of both news and advertising.¹²¹ In the early 1730s it featured about fifteen advertisements of various kinds per issue, but by the 1780s it carried an average of two hundred.¹²² As Peter Briggs has argued, ‘advertising was simultaneously an evolving system of public representation and evaluation,’ and from 1730 onwards the number of lost and stolen adverts placed in the pages of the *Daily Advertiser* increased dramatically.¹²³ In 1731 there were only sixteen lost and stolen adverts describing women’s clothing placed across 261 issues, while by 1752 there were eighteen of these advertisements alone in the thirty-three issues which survive for this year. In 1772, there were 110 lost and stolen adverts placed across 296 issues – or, on average, one in every third issue. By 1796, however – although the paper included at least two full pages of advertisements per issue – the proportion of lost and stolen adverts had declined dramatically. Though there are 309 surviving issues for this year, there were only twenty-three advertisements describing women’s clothing. Although it was a London newspaper, these lost and stolen adverts ‘were not designed solely for or by Londoners,’ as Mark Dawson has suggested. He estimates that approximately forty-five per cent of the notices in London newspapers originated beyond greater London, as editions were published to coincide with the arrival of stagecoaches bearing news from the provinces.¹²⁴ Briggs reminds us that reading newspaper advertisements in the eighteenth century was not the ‘private’ experience it usually is for us; literacy was not a prerequisite, as these notices were often read aloud and shared informally.¹²⁵ The language they used therefore needed to be, in the words of Dawson, ‘comprehensible to as big a

¹²¹ Campbell, ‘Domestic Intelligence,’ 254.

¹²² Peter M. Briggs, “News from the little World”: A Critical Glance at Eighteenth-Century British Advertising,’ *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994): 30.

¹²³ Briggs, “News from the little World,” 34.

¹²⁴ Mark S. Dawson, ‘First Impressions: Newspaper Advertisements and Early Modern English Body Imaging, 1651-1750,’ *The Journal for British Studies*, 50:2 (2011): 284-85.

¹²⁵ Briggs, “News from the little World,” 36.

crowd as possible.’ These advertisements only worked, he continues, if they ‘were both informative and informed’ and deployed a ‘language that ordinary folk themselves used and understood.’¹²⁶ This language needed to be something that people from across the social hierarchy could recognise, understand, and pass along.

It could be argued that detailed description in newspaper adverts serves one very obvious and primary function: that is, to ensure an owner is reunited with whatever they have mislaid by publicly providing as much information about that item as possible. In his discussion of these advertisements, however, Jonathon Lamb has emphasised the role of the thief-taker, arguing that descriptions of missing items were superfluous as the person who had stolen them already knew very well what they looked like.¹²⁷ Thief-takers acted as brokers between thieves and their victims, taking on the role of ‘a sort of entrepreneurial police force,’ who worked on the basis of fees and rewards.¹²⁸ Often, they were involved in these thefts themselves. J.M. Beattie has argued that the growth of mediation between thieves and their victims through thief-takers was facilitated by the expanding London press in the eighteenth century, which ‘made it possible for thefts to be publicized and contacts to be established.’¹²⁹ Victims offered a reward for information or the retrieval of their stolen possessions, along with the promise of ‘no questions asked.’¹³⁰ For many, retrieving stolen items, rather than prosecuting the thief, was the first priority, a

¹²⁶ Dawson, ‘First Impressions,’ 288.

¹²⁷ Lamb, ‘The Crying of Lost Things,’ 950.

¹²⁸ Ruth Paley, ‘Thief-takers in London in the Age of the McDaniel Gang, c. 1745-1754’ in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850*, ed. Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 302.

¹²⁹ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252.

¹³⁰ Tim Wales, ‘Thief-takers and their clients in later Stuart London’, in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 70.

responsibility which was placed squarely on the victim themselves.¹³¹ Operating through the lost and stolen adverts, thief-takers did form an important part of the culture of advertising, and we can also see what is essentially a two-way dialogue in other lost and stolen adverts, for example in those addressed to coachmen. In 1782, for instance, a caravan box which contained ‘two Gowns, a Silk Cloak, Pair of Buckles, some small Linnen, &c.’ was ‘left’ in a hackney coach, and the advertisement declared that ‘the Coachman’s Person is perfectly well known by the Lady where he took up, and likewise where he put down.’¹³² However, it is unlikely that every single lost and stolen advert was intended only for the attention of one individual, and this suggests that arguments that description in these adverts was ‘superfluous’ do not apply to the genre of lost and stolen adverts as a whole.¹³³

Due to the cost of placing an advert, which was approaching half a London labourer’s weekly wage, the majority of advertisers placing lost and stolen adverts belonged to the middling or skilled labouring classes.¹³⁴ Occasionally, however, advertisers did describe themselves as ‘poor’; in 1772 a ‘caravan box’ containing several articles of women’s clothing was advertised as lost by ‘a poor Coachman, who is liable to make good the Loss, having a Wife and Family to maintain.’¹³⁵ A ‘poor Servant Maid who must suffer the whole loss’ placed an advertisement in 1752, while a ‘poor Washerwoman’ advertised several items of clothing as stolen in 1772, claiming that they were ‘likely to be the means of depriving her of her Bread.’¹³⁶ Writing on languages of self-description used in court, Alexandra Shepard has argued that the combination of ‘poor’ and

¹³¹ John Styles, ‘Print and Policing: Crime Advertising in Eighteenth-Century Provincial England’ in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain*, 62.

¹³² BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 2 December 1782.

¹³³ Lamb, ‘The Crying of Lost Things,’ 950.

¹³⁴ Briggs, ‘News from the little World,’ 38; Dawson, ‘First Impressions,’ 281.

¹³⁵ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 23 January 1772.

¹³⁶ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 30 March 1752; 10 April 1772.

'servant' occurred regularly in the early modern period and was used by both young men and young women; this ready adoption of the language of poverty, she demonstrates, was indicative of a strong association between poverty and servility.¹³⁷ The use of 'poor' in these advertisements may therefore have reflected a deliberate rhetorical strategy, emphasising that these individuals were liable for – and perhaps unable to bear – the loss or theft of items that were not their own; the coachman lost the items out of his coach, the servant lost her mistress's clothing, and the washerwoman that of her clients. Chapter four discusses similar rhetorical strategies in more detail. I have already outlined how difficult it is to determine authorship in these advertisements, but in these instances the advertisers were most definitely not the owners. This throws into question claims that description in the lost and stolen adverts acts as evidence of the advertiser's intense desire to get their goods back. Here, we have a number of people describing clothing which did not belong to them. Indeed, Lamb himself acknowledges that in some instances it may have in fact been the thief who placed a lost and stolen advert.¹³⁸ Add to this adverts which were placed by people who had 'found' or 'stopped' various items of clothing, and we can clearly see that not all lost and stolen adverts were placed by the owners of whatever had been lost or stolen. The descriptive language used therefore needed to be something which was widely recognisable – to the thief, thief-taker, coachman, pawnbroker, person on the street, and even to the owner themselves.

What kind of things were being described in these advertisements?

Unsurprisingly, we find a lot of small and portable items like ruffles, muffs, cloaks, and pockets which were lost, dropped, left, or stolen from the body as their owners moved around the city. However, we also find clothing off the body and on the move in parcels, bundles, and boxes. In 1742, for instance, someone

¹³⁷ Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description,' 76-77.

¹³⁸ Lamb, *The Things Things Say*, 42.

advertised a lost 'Box of Womens and Childrens Wearing Apparel, and a Basket of foul Linnen' which was suspected to have been delivered to the wrong address.¹³⁹ Laundresses moving around the city carrying dirty or clean linens were a frequent target for thieves, and a huge amount of linen was advertised as lost or stolen over the century. It seems that things were also very easily lost, dropped, left, or stolen from hackney coaches, and appeals to coachmen were frequent. In 1742, a 'Green Lustring Gown and Petticoat, wrapt in a red quilted Petticoat' was left in a hackney coat by two ladies, who offered a guinea and a half reward for its return.¹⁴⁰ As well as clothing on the move, we also find it stolen from houses, lodgings, and pubs. In 1772, for example, the house of Mr Caspar Smith was 'robbed of one black Crape Gown, one flowered Cotton Gown, one Pair of stays almost new.'¹⁴¹ Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William J. Turkel have argued that more needs to be done to bring the study of probate records together with the history of consumption, arguing that the study of probate inventories – and of ownership at death more generally – 'directs our gaze to that point when a collection of objects is fixed on paper through naming and categorization.'¹⁴² In contrast, looking at lost and stolen adverts shows us clothing in movement, in various hands, and in different places. This, as we shall see, had some impact on the way in which clothing was described in these adverts.

Whoever they were addressed to or written by, printed lost and stolen adverts placed this clothing on display for public consumption; as Peter Briggs writes, 'public attention did not make all things equal, but it did tend to make all things comparable.'¹⁴³ They therefore became accessible to a wide range of people, which scholars have argued offered the opportunity to imaginatively – if not

¹³⁹ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 26 November 1742.

¹⁴⁰ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 15 November 1742.

¹⁴¹ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 28 February 1772.

¹⁴² Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age,' 2.

¹⁴³ Briggs, "News from the little World," 36.

actually – participate in this world of goods. Chloe Wigston Smith call this ‘a kind of imaginative play’ which potentially encouraged customers ‘to try things on mentally,’ while Cynthia Sundberg Wall has argued that print culture ‘made a profusion of things imaginatively as well as actually available’ to readers.¹⁴⁴ Peter Briggs makes a similar – albeit more pessimistic – argument, writing that advertising made it possible for people ‘to contemplate but not to touch objects of desire or envy to which they might otherwise have been oblivious.’¹⁴⁵ This is often understood to be a largely visual exercise; Jonathon Prude, for instance has argued that focusing on the descriptive aspect of newspaper advertisements draws our attention ‘to the vital visual dimension of eighteenth-century culture.’¹⁴⁶ Sundberg Wall too argues that descriptive language allowed contemporaries to recognise ‘a shared visual landscape of meaningful, referential detail.’¹⁴⁷ Marcia Pointon has similarly emphasised a visual dimension in the context of women’s wills, arguing that writing a bequest required ‘a particular visualization’ of a specific possession or possessions.¹⁴⁸

This begs a number of questions, not least about the actual process of description. We know that an advertiser – whether they were describing their own clothing or not – was unlikely to have whatever was being advertised in their hands, unless they were the thief. However, did women rely on memory alone when writing bequests of clothing? Or, did they look at, handle, even wear the items they were describing? It is almost impossible to provide any answers to these questions, but they are worth bearing in mind. It is perhaps easier to address whether descriptions of clothing appealed to a visual dimension alone. I

¹⁴⁴ Chloe Wigston Smith, ‘Clothes without Bodies: Objects, Humans, and the Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century It-Narratives and Trade Cards,’ *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 23:3 (2010): 357; Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 176.

¹⁴⁵ Briggs, “News from the little World,” 38.

¹⁴⁶ Prude, “To Look upon the “Lower Sort,” 126.

¹⁴⁷ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40-41, 2-3.

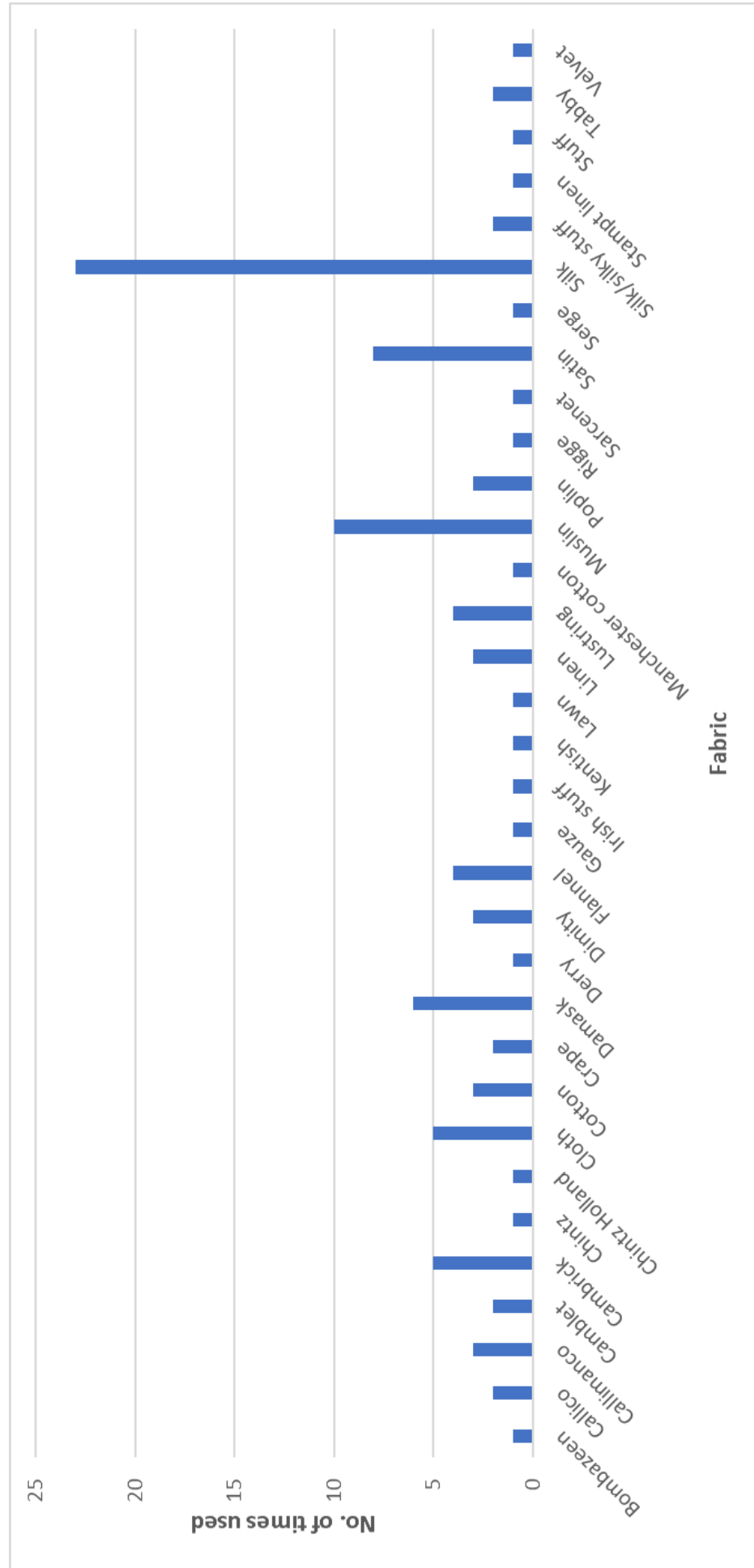
would argue that what Sundberg Wall calls a ‘shared visual culture’ is much more than this; the descriptions found in both the wills and the advertisements would have conjured up for contemporaries not just the look of a fabric, for instance, but its weight, texture, or the sound it made as it moved. Some descriptive words even appealed to a sense of smell, as, as we will see in the next section, some things were described as ‘clean,’ ‘dirty,’ or ‘foul.’

A shared world of goods?

Though the clothing lost and stolen in the streets of London and advertised in the *Daily Advertiser* was not literally the same clothing being bequeathed by women in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, the two do share the same ‘landscape of things’ – as well as a language used to describe them.¹⁴⁹ This becomes clear when we compare the descriptive words used in both sources (see lists in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). In both sources, the fabric an item was made from was described most frequently. In the sample of wills, thirty-three different fabrics were listed 105 times, while in the sample of newspaper adverts fifty-six kinds of fabric appear 445 times. The two sources share twenty-five of these fabrics. I have not included linen as a collective noun in this – for example ‘my linen and wearing apparel’ – nor I have I included ‘woollen and linen,’ which again were used as collective categories. The fabric described most often in the wills – twenty-three times between 1721 and 1830 – was silk, with muslin (which appears from 1761 onwards) coming second; they are followed by satin, damask, and cambric and cloth, which were both used five times (Table 3). The rest of the fabrics listed in the table were used to describe an item fewer times than this. Similarly, in the newspaper adverts silk again emerges as the most popular fabric and is used eighty-five times, appearing in every year of the sample (except for 1760-61 where only eight issues were available.) Again, muslin comes in second,

¹⁴⁹ Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 165-67.

Table 3. Fabrics used to describe clothing in the wills, 1696-1830.



followed by cotton (which appears only four times in the wills), dimity, lustring, plaid, stuff, cloth, lawn, linen, tabby and cambric; the rest of the fabrics listed in the table were used less than ten times each (Table 4). As we have seen, in both the advertisements and the wills several types of fabric were often listed alongside each other – for example, ‘one black Crape Gown [and] one flowered Cotton Gown.’¹⁵⁰

Both sources suggest the variety of fabrics – and therefore the variety of descriptive terms – available to the eighteenth-century individual. Writing on the Foundling Hospital tokens, John Styles has emphasised the ‘sheer number’ of different types of cloth available to the poor women who left babies at the Hospital. He found more than forty different named fabrics between 1741 and 1760, some of which ‘boast names utterly mysterious to the modern shopper, exposing a lost world of camblet and fustian, susy and cherryderry, calimanco and linsey-woolsey.’¹⁵¹ An awareness and understanding of different textiles and their qualities was common amongst the wider public in the eighteenth century, and they were able to recognise and share in the ‘referential details’ of the described fabric.¹⁵² For example, fabrics were sometimes described in the lost and stolen adverts as ‘fine’ or ‘finer’, or ‘coarse’ or ‘coarser.’ The colour of a fabric was also often noted, with black, white, red, and green appearing most frequently; Elizabeth Wilson, for example, advertised ‘a black Silk Gown’ and ‘a Pair of Stays, white Tabby before, and yellow Canvas Back’ as lost in 1742.¹⁵³ Some women also identified items of clothing by describing the pattern of a fabric, or any trimmings and embellishments applied to it. This was most common in the lost and stolen adverts, but also appeared in the wills. Mary Flint, for example, bequeathed a ‘red and white flowered Gown’ while ‘a striped

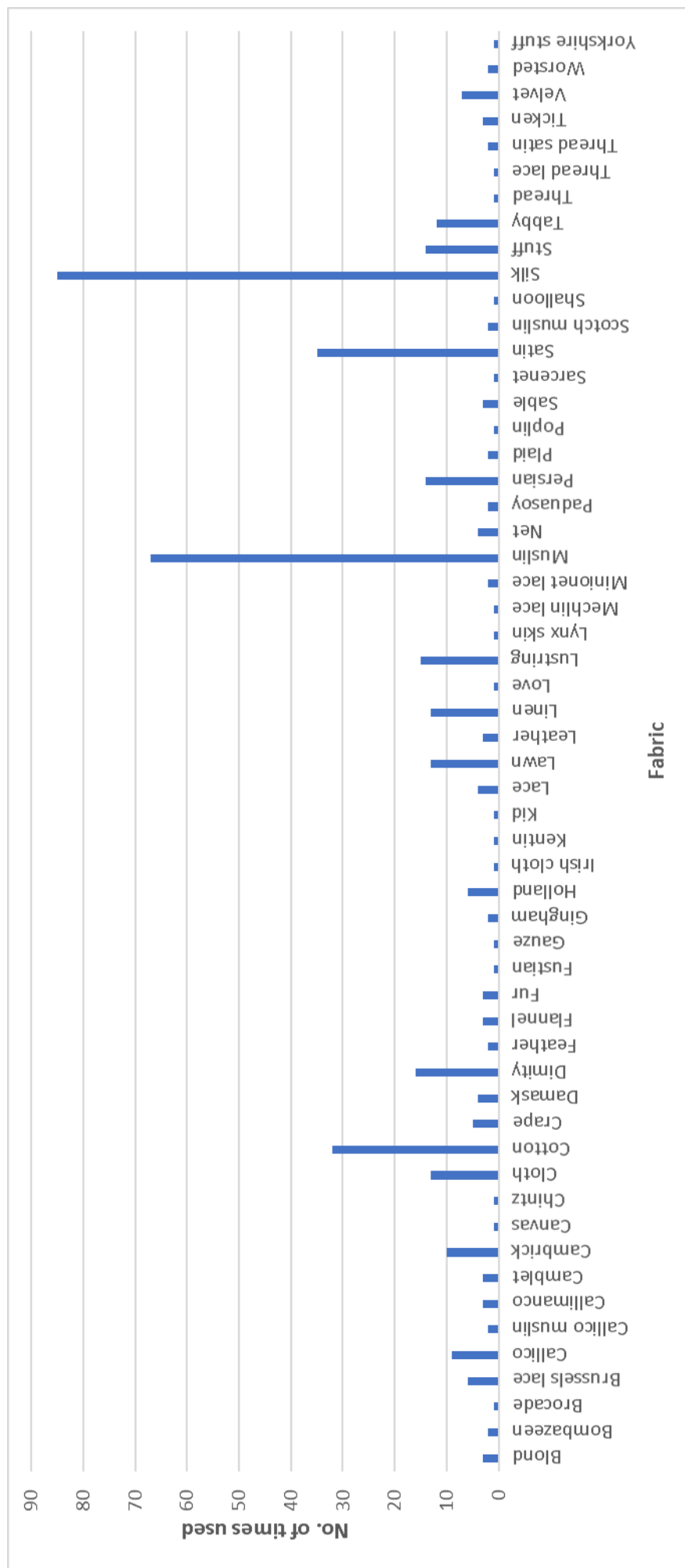
¹⁵⁰ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 28 February 1772.

¹⁵¹ Styles, *Threads of Feeling*, 19-20.

¹⁵² Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life*, 91; Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 165-67.

¹⁵³ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 21 September 1742.

Table 4. Fabrics used to describe clothing in the *Daily Advertiser* lost and stolen adverts, 1732-1796.



Lustring [Gown]; a flower'd Crimson Sattin ditto; a yellow striped Tabby ditto...a flower'd black Sattin Cloak, lined with blue, with a broad Lace round it [and] a dark Cotton Gown, with large white Flowers' were advertised as stolen in 1772.¹⁵⁴ 'Striped', 'flowered,' 'sprigged,' and 'laced' were popular both in the wills and the advertisements, but things were also described as worked, quilted and trimmed – or, in contrast, as 'plain.'¹⁵⁵

It is important to note that the detailed description of clothing in women's wills was not a phenomenon unique to the eighteenth century. However, we have already seen that there was a sharp rise in bequests of clothing in the period between 1750 to 1800, which was accompanied by a surge in detailed description.¹⁵⁶ In the sample of wills, between 1721 and 1730 only four fabrics were described four times (Table 5). But, between 1741 and 1750 this rose to seven fabrics used nine times, and peaked at seventeen fabrics between 1761 and 1770, which were used to describe items of clothing thirty-one times. After 1770, however, the number of fabrics as well as the frequency with which they were used began to decline. Between 1801 and 1830, for example, only four fabrics were used five times. 'Linens' as a category did remain steadily in use, but 'woollen and linen' – or variants thereof – began to fall out of usage towards the end of the century, reflecting a general trend towards lighter fabrics and cottons used for outwear.¹⁵⁷ Why no fabrics appeared in the period 1751 to 1760 is not clear. There are thirty women's wills available in total for these dates, which is about average; there are twenty-five wills available for the period 1741 to 1750, for example, and thirty for the period 1761 to 1770. Nonetheless, it seems that this nine-year period was characterised by a general lack of description. The

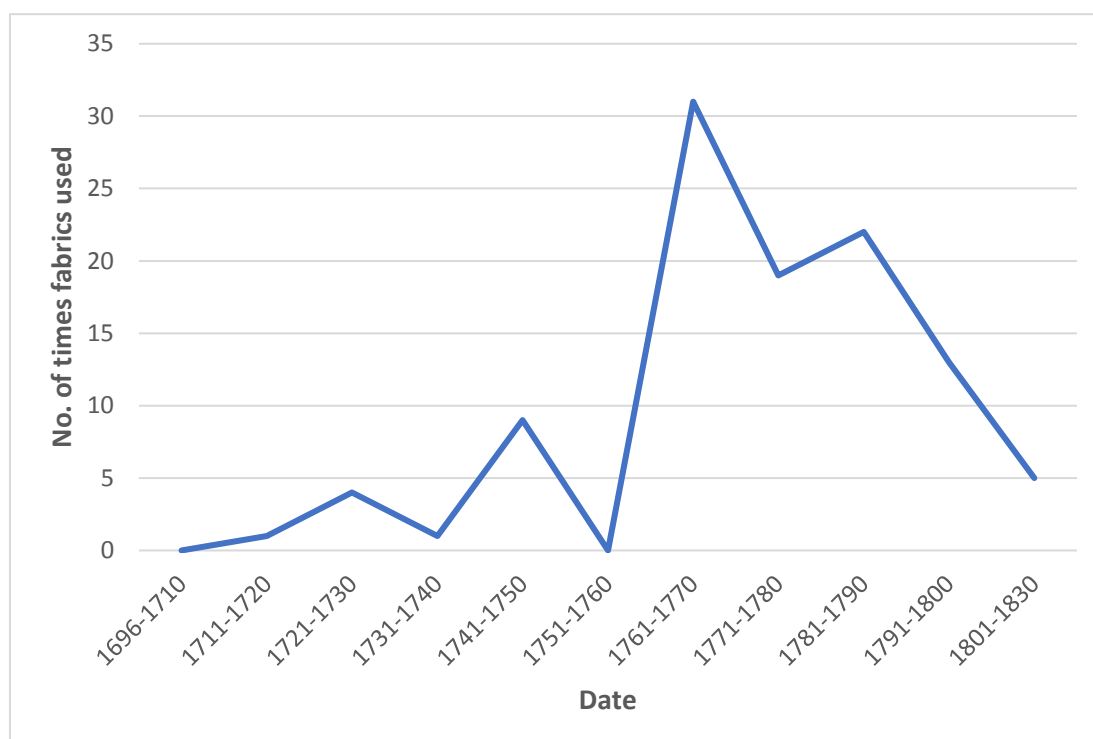
¹⁵⁴ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Flint, July 1782; BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1772.

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

¹⁵⁶ Mikhaila and Malcolm-Davies, 'What Essex man wore,' 19; Hodges, 'Widows of the "Middling Sort,"' 317; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

¹⁵⁷ Styles, 'Fashion and Innovation,' 37.

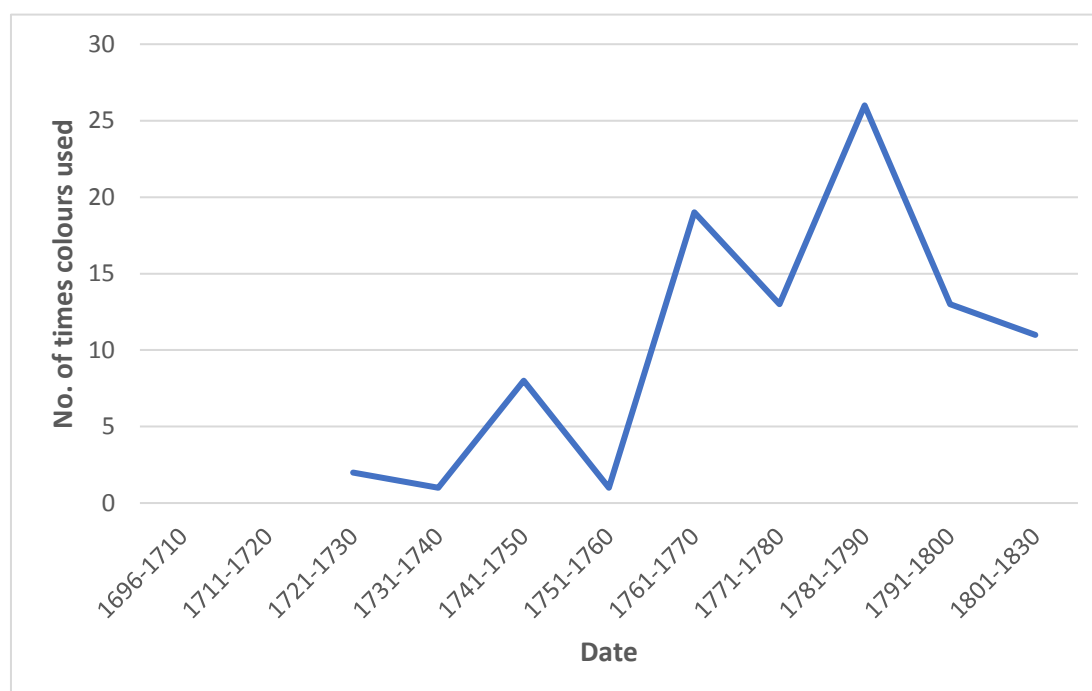
Table 5. Number of times fabric used to describe clothing in the wills, 1696-1830.



description of colour followed a similar pattern, again rising sharply from the middle of the century (Table 6). Colours appeared only ten times between 1696 and 1750, but were used to describe clothing seventy-two times between 1750 and 1800. Similarly, words like fine, figured, flowered, laced, plain, quilted, sprigged, spotted, stamped, striped, and worked only appeared in the sample of wills after 1761. In the period 1750 to 1800, therefore, women were using a greater range of descriptive words in their wills and were employing them with more frequency than in the first half of the century. After 1800, however, there was a marked decline in the number of clothing bequests which contained detailed description.

The lost and stolen adverts follow a similar pattern, demonstrating a dramatic rise in the number of advertisements from around the middle of the century,

Table 6. Number of times colour (e.g. 'red,' 'black') used to describe clothing in the wills, 1696-1830.



with a concomitant increase in detailed description. Again, if we look to the description of fabric and colour we can clearly observe this; twelve fabrics were used twenty-one times in 1731, while this rose to thirty-eight fabrics used 204 times in 1772. Colour was described just twenty-two times in 1731, while in 1772 it appeared 153 times.¹⁵⁸ By 1796, however, this use of detailed description had dropped along with the number of lost and stolen adverts. In the 309 issues available for 1796, eighteen fabrics were used seventy-four times, and colours were described thirty-eight times. Nevertheless, in both the wills and the lost and stolen adverts we can see a rise in detailed description from around 1750 up until the latter years of the century. How can we explain this increase? I would argue that it was the result of two interrelated developments. Firstly, as we have seen, as the eighteenth century marched on a wider variety of things were becoming available to more and more people. As Mark Overton et al have argued in the context of probate inventories, the level of descriptive detail

¹⁵⁸ There are 261 issues available for 1731, and 296 available for 1772.

therefore 'increased as the variety of domestic goods increased because it was necessary for appraisers to distinguish between goods of the same or similar type.'¹⁵⁹ A wider variety of goods meant that a wider descriptive vocabulary was required to delineate them. Though 'wearing apparel' or 'clothing' are certainly categories which appear across both sources, simply bequeathing or advertising a lost 'gown' was unlikely to be helpful for anyone involved. Secondly, as more and more things were becoming available, the number of detailed descriptions circulating across different genres was growing – printed texts influenced handwritten ones, and vice versa. In the words of Jonathon Prude, this was 'a period filled with descriptions.'¹⁶⁰ Both the wills and the lost and stolen adverts therefore draw on a shared and widely available language of description.

Though the two share a descriptive language, differences in the way in which women's clothing is described do also appear across the sources. In the newspaper adverts it was sometimes noted when an item was 'made' or 'unmade,' something which does not appear at all in the wills; 'not made' or 'unmade' appear most often, but things were also described as 'half-made-up', 'made up' and, in one case, 'not quite finished.' Lost out of a trunk in 1772, for instance, was 'one black Tabby Negligee, unmade' and 'one black Tabby ditto, made up.'¹⁶¹ This reflects the way in which clothing was constructed and reconstructed in the period as, for example, it was unpicked and taken apart to be laundered. Some clothing was even described as 'wet' – 'wet linen' appears as lost or stolen three times – and we are given glimpses of linens moving around the city as they were dropped, or stolen from or by laundresses and washerwomen. For example, 'a Pair of Holland ruffled Sleeves, three colour'd Aprons, a white Apron, and blue and white Linnen Jacket and Petticoat, Linnen Capts, &c., being wet' were 'carried off by a Washerwoman' from the house of

¹⁵⁹ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, 115.

¹⁶⁰ Prude, 'To Look upon the "Lower Sort,"' 128.

¹⁶¹ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 13 February 1772.

Mrs Adams in 1752.¹⁶² As well as 'wet,' items of clothing were also described as 'dirty', 'clean', 'foul', 'never washed' and 'not been washed.' This is a direct result of the nature of the newspaper advertisement as a source; the lost and stolen adverts usually describe the condition an item was in directly before it was mislaid, while wills – in contrast – deal with the future of an item. Unmade (and made), wet, dirty, are all temporary conditions. Clothing bequeathed in wills is therefore not described in this way as, in the event of any elapse in time between the date the will was signed and the death of the testatrix, these items may have moved in and out of these states several times. It could be argued, however, that the descriptive words found in both sources reflect potential for change. Decorative embellishments can be altered or replaced, fabrics can become worn, and colours can fade; 'a striped Cotton Bed-Gown, blue, white and red, the red near wash'd out' was advertised as stolen in 1742.¹⁶³ And, most obviously, 'new' clothing could become old.

In both sources the words 'old' and 'new' – or some variant thereof – appear. In the wills, 'old' was used twice, while 'new' was used six times. In the lost and stolen adverts, 'new' appeared three times more often than did 'old,' while some clothing was described as 'almost new,' 'nearly new,' 'faded,' or 'little the worse for wear.' For example, 'a black Silk Cloak, a black Bonnet, one Muslin Apron with two Tucks, one Cloth Apron, a Shift the same as the Apron, all new' were stolen from the house of one Mr Londonberry in 1796.¹⁶⁴ Just what made an item old or new, however, is difficult to determine, and seems to have relied largely on context. Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, for instance, have argued that the continued presence of old goods in elite households functioned as a marker of rank, while Hannah Greig has demonstrated that wearing old or new clothing at court could make a deliberate political statement.¹⁶⁵ And, in the context of

¹⁶² BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 17 February 1752.

¹⁶³ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1742.

¹⁶⁴ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 1 April 1796.

¹⁶⁵ Stobart and Rothery, 'Fashion, Heritage and Family,' 389; Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 122-30.

advertising and selling the new and exotic goods flooding the market in the eighteenth century, Nancy Cox has shown that 'new' became a desirable quality in itself.¹⁶⁶ 'Old' and 'new' were therefore subject to a number of different – and sometimes competing – cultural constructions in this period.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to note that they were not always conceived of as polar opposites; indeed, Jon Stobart writes that the selling of old and new goods was brought together physically in the pages of newspapers, reflecting a reality in which consumers 'moved easily between first- and second-hand circuits of exchange.'¹⁶⁸ 'Old' certainly could refer to an item of clothing which had been purchased second hand.¹⁶⁹ We can therefore guess that the items of clothing described as old or new in the lost and stolen adverts appealed to some popularly recognisable condition – age was perhaps evident in the look, or feel of a thing. This may also have been the case for the clothing described by women in their wills; however, it is possible that they also judged an item to be old or new in the context of their own wardrobes.

We can see from the sample of wills that women employed personal categories in these documents in a way which does not appear in the lost and stolen adverts (Appendix 1). By 'personal' I mean that these categories were directly related to an individual's wardrobe, rather than implying that they were

See also Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme, 'Fashioning Old and New or Moulding the Material Culture of Europe (Late Seventeenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries)' in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Preferences in Europe (Seventeenth-Nineteenth Centuries)*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart, and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 9; Ariane Fennetaux, Amélie Junqua and Sophie Vasset, 'Introduction: The Many Lives of Recycling' in *The Afterlife of Used Things*, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 222-27.

¹⁶⁷ Blondé and Van Damme, 'Fashioning Old and New,' 9.

¹⁶⁸ Jon Stobart, 'In and Out of Fashion? Advertising Novel and Second-Hand Goods in Georgian England' in *Fashioning Old and New*, 140.

¹⁶⁹ Lambert, 'Cast-off Wearing Apparell,' 17.

meaningfully personal. These categories included 'best,' 'worst,' and 'common,' as well as a number of combinations of similar terms. Only one similar category, 'common,' appears in the newspaper adverts, when school-mistress Mrs Smith advertised 'four common Aprons mark'd M S' as stolen in 1752.¹⁷⁰ Although in the period 1750 to 1800 detailed description increased across the wills, the use of these categories remained fairly constant from 1724 – when 'best' first appeared in the sample – onwards, though they were not used as often as fabric or colour.¹⁷¹ It is also important to note that these were not descriptive terms unique to eighteenth-century women, as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wills also used similar categories to describe clothing.¹⁷² 'Best' was the word which appeared in the sample of wills most often, and as a category used to describe possessions has been seized upon by a number of scholars, who usually conceive of it as part of a binary in which 'everyday,' 'working,' or 'common' forms the other part.¹⁷³ Maxine Berg suggests that clothing bequests to other women were either 'best,' 'everyday,' or something that had 'been worn on significant occasions,' and Amanda Vickery found that in the diaries of Elizabeth Shackleton 'best' and 'common' were used by her not just to describe clothing, but to categorise almost all of her possessions.¹⁷⁴ Shackleton's 'best' goods, Vickery argues, were not necessarily always new or fashionable.¹⁷⁵ Berg's study dealt with the women of the middling classes and Vickery's with the minor gentry, but John Styles has discussed the distinction between 'best' and 'working' in the context of labouring clothing, arguing that approaching it 'as a collective social phenomenon' allows us to 'ask how clothes were put to use to

¹⁷⁰ BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 23 January 1752.

¹⁷¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Elizabeth Browne, October 1724.

¹⁷² Hodges, 'Widows of the "Middling Sort,"' 317; Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked," 25; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

¹⁷³ See for example Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked," 25; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

¹⁷⁴ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 421; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 184-85.

¹⁷⁵ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 184-85.

serve the temporal rhythms and collective routines of plebeian existence.¹⁷⁶ The categorisation of clothing, he suggests, was inescapable as all but the poorest members of society owned at least two sets of clothing, and 'best' (or 'Sunday' or 'holiday') and 'working' were the categories by which this was achieved. In a convincing argument, he suggests that popular expectations about when 'best' and 'working' clothes should be worn revolved around the customary religious and festive calendar, as it was on 'high days and holidays' that plebeian men and women expected to wear their best clothes.¹⁷⁷

Does this, then, suggest a division in the way in which women from across the social hierarchy categorised their clothing? For Berg and Vickery, 'best' and 'everyday' or 'common' are highly meaningful and individual categories; that women used them to describe their clothing in their wills, Berg argues, is evidence that these bequests were 'carefully described' and therefore held some emotional significance.¹⁷⁸ Were the categories of 'best' and 'working,' in contrast, determined largely by necessity, choice, and custom for members of the labouring classes? Popular expectation *did* dictate that labouring men and women wore their best clothing on holidays; however, I would argue that we should be wary of assigning any one particular meaning to these categories, not least because women clearly developed their own variations on 'best,' 'better,' or 'worst.' Historians have also used these terms retrospectively to categorise the wardrobes of the people of the past, arguing, for example, that gowns made from coarse linens must therefore have been 'working' clothes.¹⁷⁹ Though, as Styles has shown, this can prove to be a useful analytical tool, we need to take care not to conflate retrospective categorisation with the way that these women themselves described their clothing. What *is* clear is that poor and wealthy

¹⁷⁶ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 305-306

¹⁷⁷ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 306

¹⁷⁸ Maxine Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes, 421.

¹⁷⁹ For example, see Styles, 'Involuntary Consumers?' 19; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 11.

women alike gave detailed descriptions of their clothing, and both often employed similar categories; Mary Crown, worth £9 8s, bequeathed her 'Best Stays,' as well as her 'worst Stamp lining Gown,' while Elizabeth Ellison, whose inventoried wealth was amounted 'to less than £600,' left her 'best Cap' and 'best neck Handkerchief.'¹⁸⁰

Why don't these categories appear in the lost and stolen adverts? The answer is relatively simple: though they make sense in context of an individual's wardrobe as a whole, advertisements described something which had been removed and isolated from this whole. This suggests that 'best' and 'worst' were not inherently recognisable qualities, but needed contextual information in order to be made sense of; who was the woman, and what else did she own? This is not to suggest two different processes of categorisation – one private, one public – as wills were written in order to be read by executors, administrators, and the probate court.¹⁸¹ What the various versions of 'best' and 'worst,' and, perhaps, 'old' and 'new,' *do* tell us is that when it came to writing bequests of clothing, women were able to make subjective decisions about their wardrobes as a whole, and ascribed individual items or groups of items categories according to this. For example, the widow Pease Webster bequeathed 'my best Caleco aperiens' in 1769, while the widow Sarah Ward left 'my best Chintz Gown' in 1789.¹⁸² Jane Rain of Hackforth left to her daughter 'my best black Gown, and my best Cotton Gown, my Callamanco Petticoat...my best Bonnett...and likewise all my common wearing apparel.'¹⁸³ Elizabeth Browne, 'gentlewoman' of York, also left her daughter 'my best Stayes and my best Cloake and hood,' and Elinor Parker bequeathed her 'Best hood' to her Granddaughter.¹⁸⁴ Some women used

¹⁸⁰ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Crown, May 1783; reel 1256, Elizabeth Ellison, January 1794.

¹⁸¹ Davis, 'Women's Wills in Early Modern England,' 228.

¹⁸² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1254, Pease Webster, August 1769; reel 1256, Sarah Ward, April 1789.

¹⁸³ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1258, Jane Rain, July 1814.

¹⁸⁴ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1251, Elizabeth Browne, October 1724; Elinor Parker, March 1727/8.

the term 'everyday.' The widow Margaret Nettleship of Misterton in Nottinghamshire left 'one Suite of my every Day wearing apparel of Woollen and Linnen' in 1752, and Elizabeth Ware of York bequeathed her 'every day Gown or Coate and my every day petty Coates' to Sarah Brook.¹⁸⁵ As well as identifying her 'Best Brown Camblett Gown' in a bequest to Mrs Robinson, Margaret Bulmer – spinster of York – left 'all my old Cloths both Linnen and Wollen' to her two servants Jane Carnage and Mary Wilson.¹⁸⁶ The widow Sarah Wade of York similarly described 'Five of my Best silk Gowns,' 'four of my best second aprons,' and 'My Second Best Cloths,' as well as bequeathing her 'Inferior Cloths' to her servants in 1789.¹⁸⁷

It is extremely tempting to assign particular values and meanings to these categories – for example, assuming that the 'Inferior Cloths' left by Sarah Wade to her servants were perhaps old, cheap, dirty, or even ragged, and that this somehow comments on the relationship between mistress and servant. However, we cannot make this leap; though women *were* more likely to leave clothing described as 'best' to female family members or friends than they were to servants, this does not tell that they felt more strongly about that particular person or thing. Rather, it shows us that these bequests existed in a culture in which this was an established – and perhaps even expected – culture of bequeathing. Miles Lambert writes of one testatrix in his study of wills that she was 'unusual in leaving so close a member of the family as a sister what she prefixes second-rate or "coarse" clothing,' but argues that this can be attributed to an anxious desire 'not simply to sell all her clothes.'¹⁸⁸ 'Best' has therefore been closely associated with positive 'sentimental' relationships, while 'worst' – or, in Lambert's words, 'second-rate' – has been understood to have more

¹⁸⁵ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Margaret Nettleship, March 1753; Elizabeth Ware, November 1749.

¹⁸⁶ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1253, Margaret Bulmer, August 1749.

¹⁸⁷ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Sarah Wade, November 1798.

¹⁸⁸ Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 56.

negative connotations. However, I have already suggested some of the pitfalls involved in assuming that emotions in the past were positive or negative, and these descriptive words certainly cannot offer evidence for this.

There is also some evidence to suggest that not all women were referring to specific items when they bequeathed 'best' or 'worst' clothing. While some were clearly describing specific items, others seem to account for a change in whatever might be 'best' or 'worst' at the time of their death. If we look more closely at the will of Sarah Wade, for example, we can see that she was probably not describing specific items of clothing:

I give to my Sister Marshall Five of my Best silk Gowns four of my best second aprons four of my handkerchiefs and four of my shifts and one silk petticoat, My Second Best Cloths to be divided equally between my Niece Elizabeth Wade and my Niece Rebecca Truelove for her and her Children; and the Inferior Cloths to be given to my Servants if deserving of them¹⁸⁹

How did her two daughters – who were the executrixes of her will – decide what clothing she was referring to, and who to give it to? Though Wade may have only had five silk gowns in her wardrobe, for example, the wording of her will suggests otherwise. Of course, it is highly likely that the two executrixes were already familiar with the way in which their mother had categorised her wardrobe while she was alive, and it is significant that the detailed descriptions used by women were intended to be recognisable to the administrators of the deceased's estate, who were often female executrixes or family members. These women were expected to know exactly which item of clothing a testatrix was referring to when she described it as 'best,' for instance, reflecting an assumed familiarity with the testatrix's wardrobe, as well as an understanding of her personal categories. Again, however, wills like Sarah Wade's also reflect the trust placed on female executrixes when it came to distributing bequests of clothing, as some testatrixes seem to have relied on them to judge what was 'best,' 'worst,' 'old,' or 'new,' and to distribute this according to their instruction. Even

¹⁸⁹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1257, Sarah Wade, November 1798.

in wills where clothing is given no detailed description, this does not mean that that particular individual did not categorise her wardrobe in a similar way. Indeed, though Mary Braithwait's will simply dealt with her 'Linen and Wearing apparel,' her own notes show us that she categorised her clothing into 'best,' 'new,' and 'old.'¹⁹⁰ Wills can therefore provide some evidence of wider processes of categorisation in which most women took part. Writing a will enabled some to leave a record of this process, as they described items of clothing using personal categories in combination with a popularly understood language of description.

Conclusion

Across the eighteenth century – and especially between 1750 and 1800 – detailed description increased across both the women's wills and the lost and stolen adverts; it is no coincidence that this rise in description took place over the key years of a growing world of goods. As a wider variety of things became available, so too did descriptions of them increasingly circulate across a wide range of genres. This formed a 'common landscape of things,' as well as a shared language of description with which to describe them.¹⁹¹ This was not a language which appealed to a visual sense alone, but one in which description could conjure up the weight, texture, or sound associated with particular fabrics. I argue that this gives pause to readings of detailed description as evidence of emotion, as in the sources looked at in this chapter people were simply describing clothing with the language available to them. That this language is often unfamiliar – and sometimes even lost – to modern-day readers may perhaps partly explain why so much emphasis has been placed on it; in the words of Helen Berry, 'clad in the lurid hues of lycra and polyester, we can no longer tell the subtle differences between the quality of tabbies and shagreens,

¹⁹⁰ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Braithwait, April 1779.

¹⁹¹ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 165-67.

calicoes and dimittys, and so it is easy to be taken in by the pleasures of shopping, lost in the virtual glamour of the long-dead.’¹⁹²

However, I have demonstrated that the language used in these descriptions was one which was widely recognised and understood by contemporaries. Writing about the act of description as ‘careful,’ ‘precise,’ or even ‘superfluous’ therefore invests it with more intent, deliberation, and meaning than perhaps was really the case. These words were not unusual, uncommon, or difficult to come by. Nevertheless, the detailed descriptions found in lost and stolen adverts have been interpreted as evidence of a sentimental attachment to things, as well as a strong desire to be reunited with them. This has been based largely on an assumption that the owners of lost and stolen items were the very same people who authored the advertisements but, as I have shown, authorship is more difficult to determine than this. Moreover, in these advertisements we often find people describing items of clothing that did not belong to them in much the same way as an owner might. The language they used therefore needed to be something that could be easily recognised and passed along.

Bequests of clothing in women’s wills have also been read as emotional. This is partly because the will is understood to be an inherently emotional document, but also because these bequests were most often directed to other women. Nevertheless, it is the act of description which has been interpreted as some of the most powerful evidence for emotional and ‘sentimental’ attachments in these wills. It is important to note that in the sample of women’s wills I have looked at in this chapter, less than one third mentioned clothing; moreover, of those that did, detailed descriptions existed alongside different types of clothing bequest. General bequests of clothing, for example, were much more frequent in the first half of the century but have not been read as emotional. Rather, they

¹⁹² Berry, ‘The Pleasures of Austerity,’ 263.

are most often assumed to have served a primarily economic role. It is bequests of clothing containing detailed descriptions which have most interested scholars. This is perhaps partly because – in contrast to the lost and stolen adverts – we *do* know that the author was also the owner of this clothing. Though most wills were not written in the testatrix's own hand, any detailed descriptions of clothing were therefore undoubtedly her own. But, as I have shown in this chapter, these bequests were employing a language of description which was widely available.

In the wills, description served an important legal function: to ensure that things were recognisable to executrices and administrators, in order to prevent any confusion or dispute over their dispersal. That women also employed personal categories for this is important, as it tells us that executrices were expected to recognise – or to be able to judge – what items were best or worst, or old or new in the testatrix's wardrobe. I argue, however, that what these detailed descriptions alone cannot tell us is how a testatrix felt about people or her possessions. Bequests of clothing – and of 'best' clothing in particular – have largely been associated with positive emotions like 'sentiment,' but it is impossible to tell whether this really was the case. Yes, women did leave more bequests of clothing than did men, and these bequests were almost always left to other women. As Amy Erickson argues, however, this is evidence of 'personalism' rather than anything else.¹⁹³ For example, the fact that the majority of 'best' clothing was bequeathed to family members and friends does not tell us that all these testatrices were expressing sentimental attachment. Rather, I argue that it shows that bequeathing best items within these circles was an established – and perhaps even expected – practice. Exploring who received bequests of clothing might therefore offer a useful way forward in the study of women's wills; for example, were daughters bequeathed more 'best' clothing than friends? Were nieces left clothing more often than acquaintances?

¹⁹³ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 213-25.

Though we cannot read these bequests as evidence of authentic emotion, we might use them to explore established and gendered patterns of bequeathing. In chapter two, I turn to another source in which the description of clothing has received particular attention by scholars – account books.

Chapter Two:

Accounting for the Wardrobe

Introduction

If writing a will enabled women to step back and consider their wardrobes as a whole, keeping an account book gave them a space to record money spent on adding to and maintaining it. Accounting became a widespread skill after 1650, and there is ample evidence to suggest that many eighteenth-century women were competent accountants.¹ How they learnt the practice, however, is more difficult to determine. Both Margaret Hunt and Christine Wiskin have suggested that women acquired accounting skills at home, primarily in response to family need.² Amy Froide has conducted a more thorough investigation into levels of numeracy amongst early modern women, showing that it was a discipline cultivated across the social hierarchy ‘from urban tradeswoman to genteel female investor, all of whom were quite agile with numbers.’³ And recently, Serena Dyer has argued that training in accounting began in childhood for genteel women who were given printed pocket books in which to record their small expenditures.⁴ Regardless of how they acquired these skills, there is a widespread consensus that women largely used accounting for one purpose: to

¹ Rebecca Elisabeth Connor, *Women, Accounting, and Narrative: Keeping books in eighteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 29.

² Christine Wiskin, ‘Businesswomen and financial management: Three eighteenth-century case studies,’ *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, 16:2 (2006): 159; Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England 1680-1780* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 89.

³ Amy Froide, ‘Learning to Invest: Women’s Education in Arithmetic and Accounting in early Modern England,’ *Early Modern Women*, 10:1 (2015), 4.

⁴ Serena Dyer, ‘Trained to Consume: Dress and the Female Consumer in England, 1720-1820,’ (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2016), 129.

keep track of household consumption. Household accounting has been interpreted both as a tool for the exercise of patriarchal power, as well as one which could be used against it. Writing on the seventeenth-century household accounts of Alice Le Strange, Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths have argued that accounting provides insight into the 'power relations' of the household, but was not necessarily a source of power for women as a husband might oversee and monitor purchasing activities.⁵ Amanda Vickery has made a similar point, suggesting that a woman's account book 'could be read as a map of her jurisdiction, but might also document a patriarch's surveillance of her time and spending.'⁶ It has long been accepted that the rules of coverture existed 'in a state of suspended animation' as married women could – and did – act as independent economic agents and businesswomen.⁷ Nevertheless, married women's management of the household – and the keeping of household accounts – has been consistently interpreted as subject to the authority of husbands.

The literature on women and accounting has therefore taken the household as its primary focus, and has concentrated overwhelmingly on the role of married women. In 1989 Linda Pollock noted a key 'paradox of early modern society' – that women were ostensibly expected to be 'demure, compliant and submissive' but were in reality 'successful managers of estates.'⁸ This, she argued, was not simply a case of prescription failing in practice, but instead reflected the fact that

⁵ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, 32.

⁶ Amanda Vickery, 'His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Past & Present*, Issue Supplement:1 (2006): 20.

⁷ Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England,' 707, 719-20; Linda Pollock, "Teach her to live under obedience": The making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England,' *Continuity and Change*, 4:1 (1989): 231; Erickson, *Women and Property*; Alexandra Shepard, 'Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy,' *History Workshop Journal*, 79 (2015): 3-5; Amy M. Froide, *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors during Britain's Financial Revolution, 1690-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁸ Pollock, "Teach her to live under obedience," 231-33.

women were *expected* to perform a 'dual role of subordination and competence.'⁹ In other words, they were expected to be efficient and autonomous household managers, who were ultimately subordinate to their husbands. The daily management of the household has subsequently been interpreted as an important sphere of influence for married women who, Vickery argues, held control of 'routine decision making.'¹⁰ Karen Harvey has recently attempted to write men back into this narrative of domesticity, which has positioned the household primarily as a source of authority for women, albeit an uncertain one.¹¹ Both men and women, Harvey argues, were housekeepers expected to have a close involvement with the home; for women this was imagined as 'day-to-day domestic tasks,' while male housekeeping was 'understood as overall management of the household at a global or overarching level.'¹²

Nevertheless, an understanding of housekeeping as a role primarily undertaken by women has persisted. Indeed, Amanda Vickery has argued that gendered roles even prescribed the types of expenditure recorded by husbands and wives. Looking at the accounts of married men and women in tandem, she has written several times that while a wife's consumption was 'predominantly repetitive and mundane' and for the household – covering expenditure on children, china and glass, groceries, meat, cottons, millinery, and linens – a husband's was 'characteristically occasional and impulsive, or expensive and dynastic.'¹³ Clare

⁹ Pollock, "Teach her to live under obedience," 246.

¹⁰ Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods,' 279; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 10; Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, 1; Clare Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England' in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 163.

¹¹ Karen Harvey, 'Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain,' *Gender & History*, 21:3 (2009): 523-24.

¹² Harvey, 'Men Making Home,' 532; Harvey, *The Little Republic*, 33.

¹³ Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 16; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 12-13; Styles and Vickery, 'Introduction,' 7.

Walsh similarly states that men's shopping 'was more frequently personally pleasurable than women's.'¹⁴ There exists, then, an inconsistency within the scholarship on women and accounting. On the one hand, household management has been seen as a source of authority for women, who held control of day-to-day provisioning and decision-making. On the other, it is argued that they were restricted to certain types of expenditure whilst men were freer to indulge personal pleasure. Walsh even writes of the 'constant burden' of managing household resources, while Vickery and John Styles describe the 'ongoing and relentless responsibility' reflected in women's account books.¹⁵ Alexandra Shepard has attempted to address this, arguing that the management of household resources was an essential component of women's work which 'entailed interdependence between men and women rather than the straightforward subordination of the latter.'¹⁶ This responsibility for household 'stuff,' she continues, did not restrict women to a domestic sphere, but actually placed them 'at the heart of the early modern economy.'¹⁷

Of course, this focus on the household in the scholarship stems partly from the contemporary literature itself; eighteenth-century accounting advice – or 'how-to' – manuals stated that women needed only a rudimentary working knowledge of accounting in order to manage their household resources effectively when they became wives.¹⁸ As John Richard Edwards has argued, by the eighteenth century commercial accounting was gendered as exclusively male by these manuals, while women's accounting was understood to be useful only for

¹⁴ Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making,' 164.

¹⁵ Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making,' 163; Styles and Vickery, 'Introduction,' 13.

¹⁶ Shepard, 'Crediting Women,' 17; Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, 308.

¹⁷ Shepard, 'Minding their own business,' 56.

¹⁸ For a useful overview of the titles available over the early modern period see John Richard Edwards, 'Accounting education in Britain during the early modern period,' *Accounting History Review*, 21:1 (2011): 37-67.

household management.¹⁹ From the seventeenth century onwards, these texts had stressed a need for women to acquire a basic working knowledge of arithmetic. By 1788, for example, *Arithmetic made familiar and easy to young gentlemen and ladies* had run to five editions.²⁰ And, *The accomplish'd housewife: or, the gentlewoman's companion*, which was published in 1745, urged that 'young Ladies' should be acquainted with the art of numbers – or the 'four fundamental Rules of Arithmetick' – by their seventh birthday. Beyond these essentials, however, women were not encouraged to extend their knowledge of arithmetic any further than that required for the keeping of basic accounts. 'We shall not puzzle our Female Readers with any farther forms of Arithmetical Calculations,' the book declared, 'but shall close this Branch of their Education, with giving them a transient Idea of the best Method for keeping their Account.'²¹ These 'how-to' manuals frequently included exemplar accounts for their readers, offering a guide on which they could model their own. Though these manuals had contributed towards a high degree of standardisation in accounting by the eighteenth century, we cannot know how many women actually learnt the art of accounting from them. While some may have referred to their manuals for guidance, for instance, others may have been taught accounting by mothers or fathers.

There was also another type of printed text available which acted as a guide for accounting in this period – the pocket memorandum book, and these books even included a blank space for their owners to record their expenditure. It has been argued that there was an inherent tension in these printed pocket books between consumerism and good economy, as they encouraged the female

¹⁹ Edwards, 'Accounting education in Britain,' 50.

²⁰ Anon., *Arithmetic made familiar and easy to young gentlemen and ladies. The second edition* (London, 1748).

²¹ Anon., *The accomplish'd housewife: or, the gentlewoman's companion* (London, 1745), 7-8, 123.

consumer to record what she owned as well as what she had paid.²² In contrast, Jennie Batchelor has suggested that their main significance lies in the fact that they constructed 'a feminine ideal built upon a foundation of frugality, modesty and social and economic restraint.'²³ I have chosen to look only at manuscript sources in this chapter, rather than at the combination of print and handwriting we find in pocket books. This is not to suggest that pocket books were not significant, and, indeed, some of the female accountants in this chapter may well have used them alongside their account books. However, they are a genre in their own right, and arguably share more in common with contemporary printed periodicals than manuscript account books. Moreover, it would be misleading to overemphasise the influence of the pocket book, not least because they only became widely available after 1750. Though they prescribed a specific format of accounting, these books relied on the participation of the reader to carry this out.²⁴

The emphasis on the household in the scholarship begs two important questions: just what was the household, and who belonged to it? As a unit it is central to Jan de Vries's argument for an 'industrious revolution,' and he defines the 'family-based household' as an 'entity that performs functions of reproduction, consumption, and resource redistribution among its members, as well as wealth transmission across generations.'²⁵ In other words, a household was not just delineated by a physical space, but by the ties described by de Vries. Establishing the membership of a household, however, is more difficult. Naomi Tadmor has criticised a tendency to emphasise the nuclear family to the

²² Connor, *Women, Accounting, and Narrative*, 2; Serena Dyer, 'Trained to Consume,' 128.

²³ Jennie Batchelor, 'Fashion and Frugality: Eighteenth-Century Pocket Books for Women,' *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 32 (2003): 4.

²⁴ Batchelor, 'Fashion and Frugality,' 16.

²⁵ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6, 10; Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution,' *The Journal of Economic History*, 54:2 (1994): 256.

marginalisation of servants, apprentices, boarders, and other co-residents. This has emerged as the leading residential pattern in early modern England only because, she states, an ahistorical focus on nuclear families dictates this conclusion.²⁶ Tadmor instead argues for the 'household-family' as a unit, in which she defines membership as 'co-residence and submission to the authority to the head of the household.'²⁷ The boundaries of this household are 'permeable and flexible,' and 'can expand and contract to include many individuals.'²⁸ This could include servants and apprentices as well as kin, who Tadmor argues might all be thought of as 'family.'²⁹ Though I follow Tadmor's definition of the household as a permeable and flexible unit, I deliberately make a distinction between the household and the 'family.' While a household might include those tied to it 'by contractual relationships of work,' 'family' here refers to relations by blood or marriage who may or may not belong to the same household as the accountant.³⁰ For example, the sons of Dorothy Chambers – one of the accountants looked at in this chapter – were members of her family but no longer lived in the same household, while her daughter was a member of both her family *and* her household.

In the first section of this chapter, I explore how different stages in the life cycle impacted on women's expenditure on clothing. As we have seen, scholars have placed an emphasis on accounting as an activity by married and widowed women, but as Jon Stobart points out marriage was a 'particular, albeit a

²⁶ Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Past & Present*, 151 (1996): 135.

²⁷ Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family,' 123.

²⁸ Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family,' 151, 119; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kindship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36-72.

²⁹ Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family,' 119; Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 36-72.

³⁰ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, 1.

For a similar definition of the flexible household, see Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 9; Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2012), 30.

common and often sought-after, stage in the life course of an individual.³¹ I therefore compare the expenditure on clothing of a single woman with that of a married woman, as well as a widowed one, arguing that a significant difference rests in how much expenditure was dedicated to purchasing clothing for other people. I then move on to an analysis of the impact of the household as a unit of accounting, and, though the emphasis in this discussion is largely on women from the middling classes and lower gentry, I draw on the account book of the labouring Richard Latham. By 'unit of accounting,' I mean that we can see things purchased or payments made for the household as a unit, whether as a whole, or for members belonging to it. However, I suggest that the emphasis by scholars on the household is not appropriate for all women. The single Sarah Mellish, for example, did not account for a household, but she *did* account for members of her family. Moreover, they also accounted for her, and we therefore find her clothing scattered across different account books. By analysing account books which belonged to some of the Mellish family, I therefore argue that the family can also be considered as a unit of accounting. Finally, I conclude this section by briefly considering some of the methodological issues raised by my analysis.

In the second section, I look at the role of description in all of the accounts discussed in this chapter. Though recent scholarship is recovering the role of single, married, and widowed women as independent (and successful) business owners and investors, there remains a clear – and often gendered – distinction in the scholarship between business accounting on the one hand, and household accounting on the other.³² Nicola Phillips has even urged for a reassessment of the 'extent to which patriarchal power...actually curtailed women's economic enterprises,' arguing that the 'discourse of domesticity' was 'by no means the only within which businesswomen were discussed or could themselves

³¹ Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 84.

³² For example, see Wiskin, 'Businesswomen and financial management,' 143-59; Froide, *Silent Partners*; Phillips, *Women in Business*, 1-20.

negotiate.³³ Nevertheless, a distinction between household accounting and business accounting persists in the scholarship, echoing the contemporary literature which, as we have seen, gendered business accounting as exclusively male. In the mercantile and trading context, historians have argued that accounting acted as a marker of veracity, as a proclamation of accuracy, and, most importantly, as a method of control. Mary Poovey, for example, has argued that early modern bookkeeping – and especially double-entry bookkeeping – was ‘one of the earliest practices where a prototype of the modern fact was generated.’³⁴ This was because using a formally precise system seemed to guarantee that the details it recorded were accurate reflections of transactions.³⁵ The printed guide to accounting, which became popular from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, played an important role in this by clearly establishing what a financial account should be, and what it should look like.³⁶ These popular publications, in the words of Adam Smyth, ‘established a strong link between particular methods of arranging financial records and ideas of reliability and truthfulness.’³⁷ Emphasising the importance of accounting to the ‘culture of the middling sort,’ Margaret Hunt writes that they appropriated bookkeeping as ‘a symbol of rationality, honesty, and control – in a word, of superior virtue.’³⁸ Hunt likens the art of bookkeeping to that of divination, arguing that it allowed trading families ‘to divine at any time where one’s money was going and thus forecast disaster in time to avoid it.’³⁹ Helen Berry has begun to explore accounting as a

³³ Phillips, *Women in Business*, 20.

³⁴ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 29-30.

³⁵ Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, 29-30.

³⁶ Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

³⁷ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 4.

³⁸ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 61; Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 60; Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, 29-30.

³⁹ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 58; Margaret Hunt, ‘Time-Management, Writing, and Accounting in the Eighteenth-Century English Trading Family: A Bourgeois Enlightenment,’ *Business and Economic History*, 18 (1989): 155.

medium of control for women, arguing that the Durham gentlewoman Judith Baker 'rationalised' expenditure on luxury items 'through the application of strict account-keeping.' By doing so, Berry suggests, Judith Baker demonstrates that – though 'reason was a quality largely meted out to men' – many women 'quietly got on with the highly rational business of keeping their families solvent.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, accounting for business and accounting for the household remain largely understood as distinct activities serving very different purposes, though an emphasis on rationality and truthfulness has filtered through to studies of consumption.

One result of this is that accounts are usually understood to be silent on emotion, offering 'little scope for investigating the emotional scope of the record keeper's mind or the emotional motivations behind decisions.'⁴¹ Account books 'are not the sort of document to reveal much about feelings,' writes Lorna Weatherill, while Vickery suggests that they 'lack the emotional expansiveness of diaries and letters.'⁴² I similarly argue that account books provide little evidence of how emotions were understood, performed, or expressed. Nevertheless, scholars have still attempted to read emotion into these otherwise unemotional documents. Vickery, for instance, argues that despite 'the terseness of the writing' we *can* find 'concentrated emotion' in the 'human' stories told by account books, citing entries which document the gathering of childbed linens as an example.⁴³ For a number of other scholars, however, the emotions of the accountant are to be found elsewhere. Lorna Weatherill, for example, argues

See also Phyllis Whitman Hunter, 'Containing the Marvellous: Instructions to Buyers and Sellers' in *Didactic Literature in England 1500-1800: Expertise Constructed*, ed. Natasha Glaisyer and Sara Pennell (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 174-77.

⁴⁰ Berry, 'Prudent Luxury,' 136, 144.

⁴¹ Meridee L. Bailey, 'Economic records' in *Early Modern Emotions*, 109-10.

⁴² Lorna Weatherill, ed., *The Account Book of Richard Latham 1724-1767* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), xv; Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 19.

⁴³ Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 19, 25.

that Richard Latham recorded the purchase of a covering stone for his mother's grave with a level of detail which suggests 'that he attached symbolic importance to it.'⁴⁴ As in the previous chapter, it is the detailed description of objects which has most often been interpreted as emotional in this context, based largely on an assumption that it is somehow unnecessary or superfluous. This perhaps stems partly from the fact that, as we will see, exemplar accounts in printed how-to manuals were not as descriptive as many manuscript account books. However, it also emerges from an understanding of accounting as a rational exercise. Though scholars have never attempted to determine the minimum level of description required for accounting, there remains an assumption that detailed description is somehow unnecessary – and that it is therefore significant, or even emotional, when included. And, again, clothing has been interpreted as one of the most emotionally invested possessions. Writing on the seventeenth-century accounts of Edward Dering, for instance, Adam Smyth suggests that there are moments when Dering 'lingers' over entries, 'providing more detail than we would expect from standard accounting practice.'⁴⁵ According to Smyth, Dering's 'thickest descriptions' come when he recorded the purchase of clothing, showing a level of attention 'which surpasses that which is required for careful financial accounting' and implies his 'delight' in his clothes.⁴⁶ Also writing on Dering, Sophie Pitman has made a similar point, arguing that the 'precision' with which he described his clothing was 'unnecessary,' and therefore reflects Dering's desire to 'revel in the exuberant details of this new outfit.'⁴⁷

Even when the description of clothing is not explicitly cited as evidence of emotion, it is still singled out as an area in which accountants took 'care' over.

⁴⁴ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xv.

⁴⁵ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103.

⁴⁶ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103-104.

⁴⁷ Sophie Pitman, 'Prodigal Years? Negotiating Luxury and Fashioning Identity in a Seventeenth-century Account Book,' *Luxury*, 3:1-2 (2016): 12-13.

Beverly Lemire, for example, writes that the clothing outlays of Joshua Wharton's wife were 'meticulously detailed' between 1733 to 1736; however, the examples she gives in support of this – 'a paire of Blew Stockins' and 'for making 2 Gouns & Dying them' – are not unusually detailed in comparison to the accounts looked at in this chapter.⁴⁸ Indeed, scholars seem to almost reflexively add 'meticulous,' 'meticulously kept,' or 'meticulously detailed' before 'accounts,' thereby investing the act of description with deliberation and care.⁴⁹ Building on the discussion in the previous chapter, in this section I argue again that description cannot be read in this way. First of all, detailed description was not unusual, but was rather a regular part of accounting. I also demonstrate that the descriptions of clothing recorded in account books share the language of description identified in the previous chapter, and we again find individual women's clothing being described by other people. Finally, this section makes a clear methodological intervention in the literature on women and consumption, as I demonstrate that we need to integrate an understanding of financial accounting as a 'process of textual transmission' into the study of women's account books.⁵⁰ It has long been recognised that mercantile bookkeeping involved 'the shunting of financial records between inventory, waste book, journal and ledger,' but this has rarely been taken into account in studies of consumption, which largely ignore the movement of information from text to text.⁵¹ Account books are often all that survive of the accounting process in archives, and are usually at the core of analysis in studies of consumption. And,

⁴⁸ Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life*, 198.

⁴⁹ For example, see Ehrman, 'Dressing Well in Old Age,' 29; Helen Berry, 'Women, consumption and taste' in *Women's history, Britain 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 202; Berry, 'Prudent Luxury,' 149, 150; Anne Buck, 'Buying Clothes in Bedfordshire: Customers and Tradesmen, 1700-1800,' *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991): 317; Dyer, 'Trained to Consume,' 172; Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 12-13; Phillips, *Women in Business*, 97.

⁵⁰ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 2-4.

⁵¹ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 2-4; Mark S. Dawson, 'Histories and Texts: Refiguring the Diary of Samuel Pepys,' *The Historical Journal*, 43:2 (2000): 417.

scholars have developed some useful approaches to them, for example by tracing the impact of the life cycle on patterns of consumption.⁵² Nevertheless, paying attention to these processes of textual transmission has important implications for arguments which read care or emotion into descriptions found in account books. Through an analysis of bills, I show that many of the descriptions we find in account books might well have been moved over from texts written by someone else.

Accounting for the Household and Family

This chapter looks at the manuscript account books of seven women from Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, which span the century from 1706 to 1803 (Table 7). These books were chosen because they offered a range of dates from across the century, though none of them cover a period longer than ten years. The account books which survive in collections of family papers across the country belong overwhelmingly to men and women of the middling and gentry classes, and so speak principally to their experiences.⁵³ For example, the Mellish family were London merchants in the seventeenth century, but by the early eighteenth had risen to the ranks of the minor Nottinghamshire gentry.⁵⁴ The Mellish account books offer the opportunity to investigate the family as a unit of accounting, and I look primarily at the accounts of Joan and Sarah Mellish, though I draw on other members in my discussion of the family as a unit of accounting (Table 7). This section also considers the impact of the life cycle on

⁵² For example, see Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle'; Vickery, 'His and Hers'; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 10-13.

⁵³ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 6.

⁵⁴ 'The Mellish and Buchanan Families of Blyth and Hodstock: A Brief History,' *Manuscripts and Special Collections*, University of Nottingham (accessed January 2, 2017) <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/mellishfamilyhistory.aspx>.

Table 7. List of women's account books looked at in chapter two.

Name and status	Years covered
Dorothy Mellish, <i>married</i>	1705 - 1719
Joan Mellish, <i>widow from 1707</i>	1706 - 1709
Sarah Mellish, <i>single</i>	1708 - 1718
Mary Warde, <i>single</i>	1734 - 1737
Elizabeth Constable, <i>unknown</i>	1752 - 1756
Mrs Plumbe, <i>married</i>	1761 - 1762
Dorothy Chambers, <i>widow</i>	1799 - 1800 (account book 1) 1800 - 1803 (account book 2)

expenditure on clothing, and compares the accounts of the single woman Sarah Mellish with two account books belonging to the widowed Dorothy Chambers (née Rolleston) of Watnall, Nottinghamshire. Chambers was linked to the Mellish family through her son William Cecil Chambers, who married Anne Mellish in 1811.⁵⁵ I also look throughout to the accounts of Mrs Plumbe of Bradford, which have survived in the records of the Tempest family of Tong Hall.⁵⁶ The last two female accountants are Mary Warde and Elizabeth Constable, although I do not look at these books in detail until the third section of this chapter. This is largely because it was not possible to find out as much about these two women as it

⁵⁵ MSC, Family and Estate Papers of the Willoughby Family of Wollaton, Nottinghamshire, Middleton, Warwickshire, and Birdsall, Yorkshire, 12th-20th centuries, Me A11, General Account Book of Mrs Chambers, 1799-1800; Me A12, General Account Book of Mrs Chambers, 1800-1803.

⁵⁶ WYASB, Tempest Family of Tong Hall, Family and Estate Records, 14th-20th Century, Tong/5a/5, Household account book of Mrs Plumbe of Tong Hall, 1761-1772.

was for the other five, though Mary Warde is listed as a 'Miss' in the archive catalogue. Her account book is held in the papers of the Spencer-Stanhope family of Leeds, and that of Elizabeth Constable in the papers of the Constable family of Burton Constable Hall in Hull.⁵⁷ Finally, in this section I draw on one remarkable survival as a comparative example – the account book of Richard Latham. Although Latham's account book has received much attention from scholars, it remains invaluable both for the length of time it spans, as well as for the insight it gives into plebeian life.⁵⁸ Latham began his account book in 1723 and kept it until his death in 1767 and, though it was Latham himself who wrote the accounts, he frequently described expenditure on clothing for his wife and daughters.

Though account books were remarkably standardised by the eighteenth century, following the same basic format and headings (partly as a result of the proliferation of how-to accounting manuals) each of the accountants looked at in this chapter had their own quirks which often make it difficult to untangle and interpret expenditure.⁵⁹ In contrast to the carefully ruled and organised accounts laid out in how-to manuals, manuscript account books have additions inserted between lines, entries crossed out, dates and totals changed, and notes scribbled in the margins (Figure 1). Despite an emphasis on it in a number of

⁵⁷ WYASB, Spencer Stanhope of Horsforth, Family and Estate Records, 12th-20th Century, SpST/6/2/1/1, Account book of Miss Warde for her personal expenditure, 1734-1737; ERA, Chichester-Constable Family and Estate Records, DDCC/153/20A/2, Elizabeth Constable's account book, 1752-1756.

⁵⁸ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*; Styles, 'Custom or Consumption?', 107-108.

⁵⁹ Examples of 'advice' manuals include Anon., *Advice to the women and maidens of London* (London, 1678); Alexander Brodie, *A new and easy method of book-keeping; or, instructions for a methodical keeping of merchants accompts* (London, 1722); Anon., *The accomplish'd housewife*; Adam Walker, *A complete system of family book-keeping* (London, 1758); Hannah Woolley, *The compleat servant-maid: or, the young maiden's and family's daily companion. The ninth edition with large additions* (London, 1729).

[illegible]

contemporary 'how-to' manuals, double-entry bookkeeping was not used by any of the accountants, who all had different approaches to keeping track of expenses. Some accountants like Sarah Mellish and Dorothy Chambers made note of both receipts and disbursements, while Chambers also balanced the two (Figures 2 and 3). Others, however, simply recorded their expenditure. For example, Mrs Plumbe's account book (Figure 2) lists only her outgoing expenses. Some of the women calculated their yearly or monthly expenses, while others did not. Joan Mellish, for instance, never totalled up any of her expenditure while her daughter Sarah did so on a regular basis (though her totals were often incorrect). Although account books are a staple source for studies of consumption, they only record payments for goods and services and rarely tell us about items of clothing already in the accountant's possession, unless they record a payment for an item to be cleaned, mended, or altered. I discuss this in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

Figures 2. & 3. Two pages from the account book of Dorothy Chambers, 1799, Me A11. Printed with permission from Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

Cash Recd.

March 26	Brought over	205 6 3
	Tho. Simpson for Rent of the Orchard from Sep. 16-98 to Feb. 1-99	3 3
	Total	208 9 3

Cash Paid

1799 March 26	Brought Over	176 4 9
	Carving knives & fork - Parker	7 -
	Paper 1/2 Pins 2/1 Shipboard 4/6	3 8
	Decanters two pair 14/-	14 -
	Worsted 1/6 - Glass 1/0	1 4
29	Butter 2/6 Both	1 16 2
	Milk for Six Months	4 6 11
	Birdcage 2/- Fish 1/0	3 10
	Sticks for 9 Ten Candles at 10/-	4 15 3
	Eight Mr. Cotton stockings 1/-	1 -
30	John Bird's Cages for six months	7 7 -
	One set of 2	7 7 -
	Ribbon 1/4 Hair Toppet 3/-	4 2
	Green Ribbon 1/6 Biscuits 1/-	2 6
	Mending silver Saucepan & Spoon	2 6
	Half a year's Paper Both & Stationery	7 17 6
	One March 2 - Ten B. S. T. -	7 17 6
	Total	205 7 9
	To Balance carried forward	3 1 6
	Total	208 9 3

Moreover, surviving account books may only act as a partial record of the accounting practices of an individual, as some of the books looked at in this chapter hint that these women may also have kept other records which no longer exist. Records are made of the purchase of new account books, for instance, while accounts are described as being 'brought over' from another book, or 'carried over' to a new one. In addition, it is possible that some of these women kept more than one account book at the same time. As well as the account book discussed in this chapter, for example, Mary Warde kept a contemporaneous account book which dealt exclusively with expenditure on her garden.⁶⁰ And, the account book of Mrs Plumbe regularly lists expenditure on the 'house account,' suggesting that this was kept track of elsewhere.⁶¹ Indeed, one of the key arguments of this chapter is that many women moved information from text to text in the accounting process. In some account books, for example, purchases are noted in the back before being entered into the accounts proper, while other women noted purchases on scraps of paper. Account books are therefore one of – rather than only – products of a wider process.

As we have seen, the household as a unit of accounting has received the most attention from scholars who usually focus on married or widowed women. Though some studies have attempted to explore the domestic consumption of unmarried women, their relationship to the household remains underexplored.⁶² As Tanya Evans points out, widows and single women need to be differentiated as the former were much more likely to become heads of households.⁶³ It was

⁶⁰ WYASB, Spencer Stanhope of Horsforth, Family and Estate Records, 12th-20th Century, SpSt/5/4/1/10, Account book of Mary Warde, 1735-1738.

⁶¹ WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

⁶² See, for example David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 207-30; Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 90.

⁶³ Tanya Evans, 'Women, marriage and the family' in *Women's history*, 67.

not impossible for a spinster to become the head of her own household, and Jon Stobart has traced the expenditure of the single woman Mary Leigh, who inherited and managed her family's estate; however, it was much rarer.⁶⁴ This begs the question, if most single women were not accounting for a household, what were they accounting for? Here, I offer a detailed analysis of Sarah Mellish's expenditure on clothing in order to consider the impact of her unmarried status on her accounting and expenditure. A number of contemporary account books belonging to various members of the Mellish family of Nottinghamshire have survived, which is relatively rare (Figure 4). In 1670, Joan Harvey married Samuel Mellish, and the couple went on to have three children – Joseph, Martha, and Sarah, who never married. Joan kept an account book in the final years of her life, which mentions various items of clothing belonging to her daughter Sarah as well as clothing purchased for her Granddaughter Molly.⁶⁵ Sarah similarly kept an account book, dating from 1708 to the year of her death in 1718, in which purchases of cloth and clothing are frequently described.⁶⁶ Sarah's sister-in-law, Dorothy Mellish, also kept an account book of sorts, which she began in her early twenties. While it does contain some accounts, as well as a record of preparations made for the birth of one of her six children, it is perhaps best described as a recipe book.⁶⁷ Joan Mellish also had another three children from a previous marriage named Tobiah

⁶⁴ Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 90.

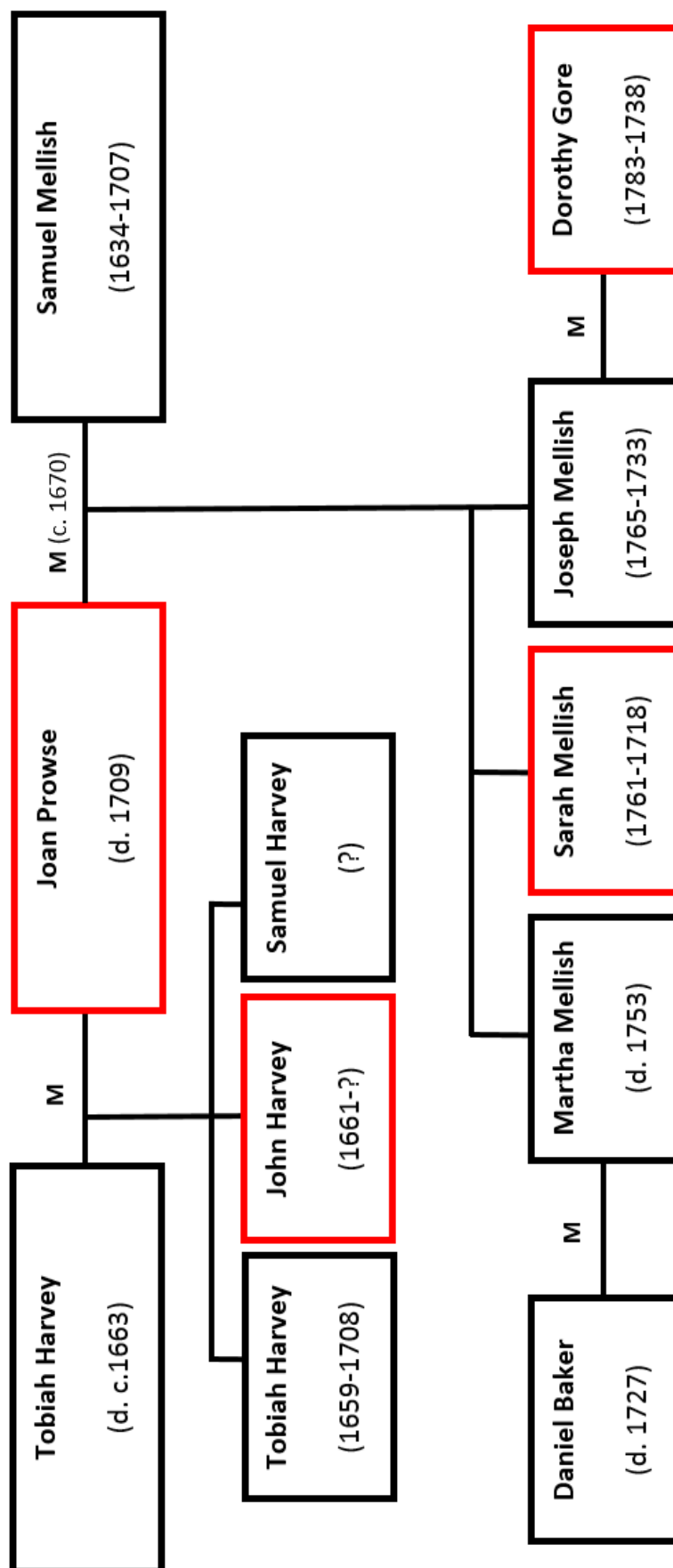
⁶⁵ MSC, Papers of the Mellish Family of Hodstock, Nottinghamshire, c. 1160-1991, Me A 7, Account Book of Joan Mellish, 1706-1709.

⁶⁶ MSC, Papers of the Mellish Family of Hodstock, Nottinghamshire, c. 1160-1991, Me A 8, Account Book of Sarah Mellish, 1708-1718.

⁶⁷ MSC, Papers of the Mellish Family of Hodstock, Nottinghamshire, c. 1160-1991, Me 2 E1, Account and recipe book of Dorothy Gore, 1705-1719.

For a discussion of this genre see Catherine Field, "Many hands hands": Writing the Self in Early Modern Women's Recipe Books' in *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World: Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dows, Julia A. Eckerle, and Laura Knoppers, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Figure 4. Family tree showing the children of Joan Mellish, née Prowse, with the accountants looked at in this chapter highlighted in red.



Harvey, Samuel Harvey, and John Harvey, whose account book for the years 1705 to 1720 survives.⁶⁸ Though it is listed in the archive catalogue as 'Personal and Estate Accounts of unknown author,' I was able to identify John Harvey as the accountant through a comparison with the account books of his mother and half-sister Sarah.⁶⁹

Sarah Mellish was in her late thirties when her account book began in 1708, and had presumably been living with her mother until her death in 1709. It is clear that she did not head her own household after this. This is supported by an obvious contrast between her expenditure on food with that recorded in her mother's account book. While Joan Mellish's accounts record frequent payments for foodstuffs – bread, butter, milk, eggs, veal, beef, rabbits – Sarah's note only small purchases of consumables like sugar, tea, and raisins. Of course, it is possible that Sarah kept another account book which detailed other expenses, but there is evidence to suggest that she moved between households and was probably reliant on others to provide her with these items. Although she employed her own servants, her accounts make it clear that she spent much time moving around, often staying with family members and friends. Amanda Vickery found a similar pattern in the account books of the single Diana Eyre, who lived in her brother-in-law's household.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ 'Biography of Samuel Mellish (1634-1707),' *Manuscripts and Special Collections*, University of Nottingham (accessed 1 January, 2017) [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofsamuelmellish\(1634-1707\).aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofsamuelmellish(1634-1707).aspx); 'Biography of Joseph Mellish (1675-1733),' *Manuscripts and Special Collections*, University of Nottingham (accessed 1 January, 2017) [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofjosephmellish\(1675-1733\).aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofjosephmellish(1675-1733).aspx).

⁶⁹ BOR, The Womersley Collection, WOM/2/4/1, Personal and Estate Accounts of unknown Author, 1705-1720.

⁷⁰ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 213-15.

Sarah Mellish's annual expenditure was calculated for every year between 1708 and 1718, although her accounts began in September 1708 and ended in June 1718. Over these years, she spent on average £210 a year, although this fluctuated wildly between £61 6s 6d spent in 1717, and £336 18s in 1716 (Table 8). She was therefore a relatively wealthy member of the gentry. To put this expenditure into perspective, in December 1709 Sarah Mellish recorded a payment of £3 to her servant Molly Shaw for 'her years wages Due at martlemass.' This sum represented just under 1 per cent of her total yearly expenditure for that year. And, as we saw in chapter one, the movable goods of the majority of women who had their probate proven in the Dean and Chapter Court of York had a total estimated worth of less than £100. Sarah Mellish received an income of between £123 and £528 each year from interest on sums of money, rents from property in Bolton, as well as a survivorship, and seems to have lived within her means. Her expenditure on clothing was then calculated for each year between 1708 and 1718, and I have included in this purchases of clothing, accessories, and textiles, payments for making, mending, or altering garments, as well as the purchase of clothing for other people (Table 8). I have not included money 'laid out' on clothing for family members, as she would expect to receive these sums back in due course. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to establish just how much money Sarah Mellish actually spent on her clothing, not least because her own additions are often incorrect. For instance, she frequently recorded paying bills to people she *usually* purchased these goods and services from, without specifying what the payment was for. I expand on this in more detail towards the end of this chapter, but it is important to note here that this can result in an incomplete picture of an individual's expenditure. In 1710, for example, Sarah Mellish clearly spent £44 18s 2d – or about a quarter of her yearly expenditure – on her wardrobe. However, once we take into account bills paid to people she *usually* purchased clothing from, or made payments to for making, mending, or altering it, this rises to just over a third of the total. Table 8 demonstrates that I have taken these bills into account when calculating expenditure on clothing, but it is more than likely that all of the accountants looked at in this section made payments for clothing which we will

Table 8. Sarah Mellish's yearly expenditure and yearly expenditure on clothing, 1708-1718.

Year (January - December)	Total yearly expenditure	Spent on clothing, % of total yearly expenditure	Spent on clothing counting unspecified bills, % of total yearly expenditure
1708 – 1709 [beginning September 1708]	£78 8s 7½d	£21 4s 6d (27%)	£23 0s 6d (29%)
1709 - 1710	£321 8s 10d	£44 18s 2d (14%)	£66 1s 2d (21%)
1710 - 1711	£106 6s 11½d	£16 2s 10½d (15%)	£44 3s 10½d (41%)
1711 - 1712	£197 9s 9½d	£65 19s 11½d (33%)	£93 16s 10½d (48%)
1712 - 1713	£119 5s 4d	£48 0s 11d (40%)	£54 3s 8d (45%)
1713 - 1714	£140 6s 7d	£48 11s 6d (34%)	£71 17s (51%)
1714 - 1715	£532 18s 7½d	£43 0s 5½d (8%)	£123 12 9½d (23%)
1715 - 1716 [not including February]	£336 18s	£13 2s 1d (4%)	£27 9s 5d (8%)
1716 - 1717	£61 1s 6d	£14 4s 11d (23%)	£27 0s 8d (44%)
1717 - 1718 [January to June]	£55 9s 9½d	£26 7s 1d (47%)	£26 11s 7d (47%)

never know about. For example, in 1709 Sarah Mellish recorded a payment of £12 6s 2d to 'Sister Mellish' for what she had 'laid out' for her, but without a corresponding entry in Dorothy Mellish's account book we would not know that at least some of this money was spent on clothing.⁷¹ As this sum represented approximately another fifteen per cent of Sarah's total expenditure for that year, she likely spent even more on her wardrobe in other years than has been estimated.

On average, Sarah Mellish usually spent between a quarter and half of her yearly expenditure on clothing (Table 8). In 1709, she spent around £23 on her clothing, approximately a third of the total for that year, while in 1714 she spent just over half. This expenditure fluctuated yearly, and according to how much she had spent in total. Purchases of mourning clothing in 1710 and 1714 reflected an expensive investment, while an unusually high yearly expenditure of £532 in 1715 meant that just under a quarter of the total was spent on her wardrobe. Money spent on clothing therefore represented a consistently high proportion of her yearly expenditure, which, aside from the occasional big expense, remained fairly constant. For instance, she regularly spent money on buying 'cures,' 'drugs,' ingredients for various drinks (a 'lime drink' seems to have been a favourite), powder, sugar, tea, coffee, and letters. She also recorded the payment of her servants' wages – a Nelly Shaw received a wage of £2 in March 1709 and £3 in December – as well as for services rendered. Her expenditure is similar to that of the single Diana Eyre, whose account book dates from 1749 to 1777. Vickery argued that Eyre represented a 'household within a larger household,' as she employed servants but devoted most of her expenditure to 'personal treats' rather than wider contributions to her brother-in-law's household.⁷² Though Sarah Mellish often moved from household to household, this suggests that as a single woman she was able (or obliged) to devote the bulk

⁷¹ MSC, Me A8, Me 2 E1.

⁷² Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 213-15.

of her expenditure to her own needs. Aside from clothing, her second-largest expense was money 'given.' Usually no more than a few shillings, and rarely more than £1, money was 'given' to the 'music' in January, to friends and family members, servants, charitable briefs, widow women, nurses, and a number of other recipients (and was sometimes simply recorded as 'given'). In 1709, money 'given' amounted to around twenty per cent of her yearly expenditure, just below the third spent on her wardrobe. Though this is beyond the remit of this study, charitable giving by women like Sarah Mellish is in need of more attention. It has rarely been outlined or explained in studies of consumption, but many of the female accountants looked at in this chapter frequently 'gave' money to various causes.⁷³

In contrast, the account books of Dorothy Chambers reflect a much smaller proportion of yearly expenditure dedicated to the wardrobe. Dorothy Chambers (née Rolleston) of Watnall in Nottinghamshire married William Chambers of Derby in 1767, when she was in her early twenties. Her husband, almost twenty years her senior, died in 1777 leaving her with three children under the age of ten – a son named William Cecil Chambers, a daughter named Rosamond Chambers, and a younger son named Lancelot. Dorothy would die in 1809 aged around 66 without seeing any of her children married. Two of her account books dating from 1799 to 1803 were looked at, the first beginning when she was in her mid-fifties and her children were aged between 26 and 31. Their initials frequently appear in her accounts, while Dorothy referred to herself as 'DC' or 'Mrs C.'⁷⁴ Yearly expenditure between 1799 and 1803 as recorded in her account

⁷³ For a discussion of the charitable disbursements of an elite woman, see Donna T. Andrew, 'Noblesse oblige: Female charity in an age of sentiment' in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, 275-93.

⁷⁴ 'Biography of Anne Chambers, née Mellish (1781-1855),' *Manuscripts and Special Collections*, University of Nottingham (accessed 1 September, 2016)
[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofannechambers,neemellish\(1781-1855\).aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/mellish/biographies/biographyofannechambers,neemellish(1781-1855).aspx).

books is unsurprisingly much higher than that of Sarah Mellish at an average of £1000, with a low of £775 in 1802 and a high of £2232 in 1800. Dorothy was a comparatively well-off widow at the head of her own household, while Sarah Mellish was a single woman moving around different households. Again, the account books of Dorothy Chambers share all the same difficulties with calculating expenditure on clothing discussed above. Nevertheless, it is clear that the purchase and maintenance of clothing reflected only a relatively small proportion of her yearly expenditure. For example, in 1800 when she recorded spending over £2232, only £68 11s 1d – or less than five per cent – of this was spent on clothing. This year saw a number of large expenses, including £222 spent on the ‘Purchase of a Lease House in Queens Square’ as well as £100 ‘Paid into the stocks’ for Rosamond Chambers, but expenditure on clothing remained relatively low even in other years. Again, in 1802 less than ten per cent of her yearly expenditure was dedicated to clothing.⁷⁵

Dorothy’s account books rarely record payments of more than £1 on clothing, except for the occasional expensive purchase. In 1800, for example, one Mrs Baker was paid £11 17s ‘for Gown, Corsets, Cap &c,’ and in March that same year a ‘A long white Shawl’ costing £12 12s was purchased for ‘Mrs C.’ Rosamond Chambers also received ‘a cambric Muslin printed Gown’ costing £2, and two further bills were paid to Mrs Baker for both ‘Mrs C and Miss C’ in June of the same year.⁷⁶ Like Joan Mellish, the account books of Dorothy Chambers record numerous payments made to butchers and bakers, as well as payments made on the ‘House account,’ which alone cost £171 in 1800.⁷⁷ Clearly, the responsibilities of a widowed head of household meant that Dorothy’s expenses were very different to those of a single woman, as Sarah Mellish dedicated a much higher proportion of her expenditure to clothing than did Dorothy. Indeed,

⁷⁵ MSC, Me A 11, Me A 12.

⁷⁶ MSC, Me A 12.

⁷⁷ MSC, Me A7, Me A 11, Me A 12.

the account book of Joan Mellish hints that accounting for a household was not the province of a single woman. When Joan was nearing the end of her life, Sarah Mellish took over writing in the account book for her mother, perhaps due to Joan's failing health. Although it is clear from a comparison with her own account books that this is Sarah's hand, the accounts remained largely the same – the same things were purchased, and the same people were paid. After her mother's death in January 1709, however, Sarah ceased to write in the account book and it was subsequently taken over by a different hand later that same month. Again, the accounts remained very similar, and the fact that the new accountant continued to purchase the same things and pay the same people suggests that they, and not the unmarried Sarah, had taken over the running of the household. Though the handwriting does not match that of Dorothy Mellish, it is possible that another sister-in-law of Sarah's inherited these accounts as the new accountant recorded the purchase of clothing for her 'mother' as well as for the 'master.'⁷⁸ This also suggests that this particular account book might have been tied to the household, rather than to the individual, as a number of different hands contributed to it.

Another key difference between the accounts of Sarah Mellish and those of Dorothy Chambers is that Sarah's expenditure was overwhelmingly dedicated to her own clothing, while Dorothy frequently spent more money on clothing for other people in her family and household. She usually noted for whom a payment had been made, often using her children's initials; 'RC' or Rosamond received a 'cambric Muslin printed Gown' in 1800, while 'Mrs C' herself had '3 shifts' made in 1799.⁷⁹ A similar pattern of expenditure also emerges in the account book of the married Mrs Plumbe of Bradford. Mrs Plumbe had three children – Thomas born in 1736, Frances born in 1741, and William born in 1744. Little is known about Mrs Plumbe (and only a father's name is listed on the

⁷⁸ MSC, Me A7.

⁷⁹ MSC, Me A 11.

baptism records of her children) but her son Thomas would eventually go on to marry Elizabeth Tempest, thereby acquiring the manor of Tong Hall in Bradford in 1763.⁸⁰ Mrs Plumbe's account book dates from 1761 to 1762, and her daughter Frances – or 'Fanny' – appears most often, presumably because at the age of 20 she was unmarried and still living in her parents' household. Indeed, she was regularly given control of spending on the 'house account,' perhaps in training for the day she became a married woman herself. Mrs Plumbe noted various payments for all three of her children, for instance in August 1761 when she paid for 'Stufe for t[a]ping fans petty Coat' as well as 'for making fans Gown.' In that same month she also 'paid Mrs Norris for making my Gown 2s [and] body lining 1s 3d,' and other various purchases 'for self' were similarly recorded over the course of the account book.⁸¹ Although the children of both Dorothy Chambers and Mrs Plumbe were all over sixteen years of age, their mothers continued to pay for various items in their wardrobes. In the case of Rosamond Chambers and Fanny Plumbe this was perhaps because they continued to live in the parental household, while William Plumbe was only seventeen when his mother's account book begins. Indeed, after 1764 Mrs Plumbe stopped making payments for Fanny's clothing, suggesting that she may have moved out of the household.⁸² However, these mothers still purchased clothing for adult sons who no longer lived in the household. In particular, both women made payments for their sons' linen – they purchased fabric, and paid to have it made up into shirts and other items. In 1800 Mrs Chambers paid for 'Makeing three Shirts for L.C.,' and later that year paid £4 'for Irish cloth for W.C.C. Shirts.'⁸³ Mrs Plumbe similarly recorded paying 'Mr Hollingshead for Cloth for my 2 Sons Sh[i]rts,' and for 'making W^m P shirts.'⁸⁴ It was common for mothers to provide their sons with linen and, though these mothers did not *make* these shirts themselves, they

⁸⁰ Lillian Robertson, 'The Tong Manuscripts,' *The Bradford Antiquary, the Journal of the Bradford Historical and Antiquarian Society*, vol. 1 (1985): 11.

⁸¹ WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

⁸² MSC, Me A 11, Me A 12; WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

⁸³ MSC, Me A 12.

⁸⁴ WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

assumed this responsibility by sourcing the fabric and overseeing the making-up and washing.⁸⁵ I discuss the provision of linen in more detail in chapter four, but it demonstrates here that these women were also accounting for family members not resident in the household.

Both the widowed Dorothy Chambers and the married Mrs Plumbe also purchased clothing for other members of the household. We saw in the previous chapter that women sometimes left bequests of clothing to female servants, who could also expect to receive clothing while their mistresses were alive. In 1799 Dorothy Chambers paid for '13½ yds Gingham for Gowns for Betty & Nanny,' two female servants in her employ, while in November 1761 Mrs Plumbe recorded paying for her servant Molly's gown to be made.⁸⁶ Clothing male servants could involve a heftier investment. In 1802 Dorothy Chambers paid a male servant named John Hind £6 2s in 1802 'for loss of clothes' and in December of that same year spent £16 on 'Man Servants Clothes for one Year,' a sizeable proportion of the £62 1s 2d spent on clothing in total.⁸⁷ This mirrors the expenditure of Mary Leigh, which Jon Stobart has traced over the life cycle. Though she remained unmarried, Mary was unusual as she inherited Stoneleigh Abbey in the 1780s and became responsible for managing the estate. As a young woman – and before she inherited the family estate – her expenditure was largely personal, but this was overtaken by other priorities when she became the head of a household.⁸⁸ Thereafter, her expenditure on clothing was dedicated largely to supplying servants rather than herself.⁸⁹ Though Sarah Mellish occasionally contributed to her servants' wardrobes, she did not do so as regularly as Dorothy Chambers; in 1711, for example, she purchased 'A pair of shues' for her servant Peg Bradley, as well as purchasing another servant named

⁸⁵ Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 29-30.

⁸⁶ MSC, Me A 11; WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

⁸⁷ MSC, Me A 12.

⁸⁸ Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 90.

⁸⁹ Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 90.

Molly Shaw 'A pair of stay for her self.'⁹⁰ This analysis suggests that, in the accounts of women at the head of a household, a smaller proportion of expenditure was dedicated to clothing. Moreover, they frequently purchased clothing for other people alongside personal expenditure. This combined spending on family members who were not always members of the household, with purchases for members of the household who were not always family. Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths have identified a similar pattern in the accounts of the seventeenth-century Le Strange family.⁹¹ In contrast, the single Sarah Mellish, who was moving around households, dedicated a higher proportion of expenditure to her own clothing, and was responsible for clothing fewer dependents.

Though Richard Latham was the male head of a very different type of household, his account book also reflects purchases of clothing made for household members. Plebeian accounts are extremely rare, and so Latham's, which he began in 1723 and kept until his death in 1767, are a remarkable survival. The Lathams were a family of yeoman or tradesmen living in Ormskirk in South Lancashire. Richard married Ann – who he referred to as 'Nany' in his account book – in 1723, and the couple went on to have six daughters named Betty, Sara, Rachael, Ann, Alice, and Martha (another daughter named Alice died in infancy). The couple also had one son, 'Dicy,' who died in his early twenties.⁹² In the context of the Latham accounts, it is the family as a unit of accounting which has received the most attention. Both John Styles and Lorna Weatherill have written about the impact of the family life cycle on Latham's expenditure and, looking specifically at clothing, Styles has shown that the family's spending fell into three distinct periods. During the first eighteen years of Richard and Nany's marriage, expenditure on clothing was limited as the couple had a number of young

⁹⁰ MSC, Me A 8.

⁹¹ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, 3.

⁹² Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xi-xiii.

children who could not be put to useful work. Between 1742 and 1754, however, when Latham's daughters were older and able to earn money but still lived with their parents, expenditure on clothing increased dramatically, with his daughters becoming the principal beneficiaries. Finally, as Latham's daughters began to leave home to live in other households, and as he and Nany began to age, expenditure on clothing fell once again. By 1757, only two daughters remained in their parents' house.⁹³ Latham's expenditure fluctuated from year to year and, apart from in the year of his death, it was at its lowest in 1731 at just over £9, when he and Nany had four young children.⁹⁴ In contrast, between 1740 and 1750 when the household size had risen to nine people, expenditure rose to between £17 and £51 a year.⁹⁵

When describing expenditure on clothing, Latham like Dorothy Chambers consistently recorded who the payment had been made for. In 1724, he noted the purchase of 'new shoos for Nany 2s 8d.'⁹⁶ Latham also noted purchases of clothing made for his infant children; in 1719, for example, '1 cap' was purchased for the three-year-old Betty and in 1734 the five-year-old Sara was bought 'stockings.' He also continued to list purchases made for his children once they had reached adulthood.⁹⁷ In 1749, which fell within the years of the Latham family's 'peak' expenditure on clothing, his daughters received a number of items of clothing. Sara was bought 'new shoos' as well as 'an other pair of shoos for work dayes,' and she and Betty both received 'new' hats. A 'printed gown' was also purchased for Betty which, at twenty shillings, was a relatively

⁹³ Styles, 'Custom or Consumption?' 107-108; Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xiv, xxv.

See also Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 12-13.

⁹⁴ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, Table 2, xxii.

⁹⁵ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, Table 2, xxii.

⁹⁶ A sample was taken from the account book every five years between 1724 and 1767.

Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*.

⁹⁷ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, sample for 1734.

expensive garment.⁹⁸ Rachael and Ann were both bought 'new cloth for shifts,' while Ann received a 'new gown,' and payments were made for Rachael's new shoes, 'stufs for stays,' and a 'new cloak.' Alice and Martha did not receive as many items as their sisters (perhaps because they were the two youngest) but an apron was purchased for Martha and both were bought 'new' shoes. It seems that Latham also paid for around sixteen days of tailor's work over the course of this year, costing him just over eighteen shillings.⁹⁹ The Latham account book tells the story of a labouring family, with peaks and troughs of expenditure the direct result of the family life cycle. However, it also tells the story of a household. Unlike the female accountants looked at in this section, the Lathams did not employ live-in servants and so their household was made up of family members. Nevertheless, membership of the household directly impacted on expenditure on clothing; while Latham's adult daughters were still members of the household clothing was purchased for them, but this stopped once they had moved out of it.

Though the household as a unit can be clearly identified in the accounts of Dorothy Chambers, Mrs Plumbe, and Richard Latham, this is not the case for Sarah Mellish. As a single woman she lived within households rather than at the head of them, and was not responsible for clothing dependents in the same way. Nevertheless, she did not account for herself alone. We have already seen that she employed servants, but she also recorded expenditure on members of the family. Moreover, her clothing appears across their accounts. In 1706, for example, Joan paid a Mrs Hargrate one shilling and four pence 'for bringing Sarah Stayes,' and sometimes noted payments for washing Sarah's clothing.¹⁰⁰ Often, these entries described items of clothing which do not appear in Sarah's own accounts. In January 1709, Dorothy Mellish listed a number of payments

⁹⁸ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, sample for 1749.

⁹⁹ This is my calculation of the expenditure.

Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, sample for 1749.

¹⁰⁰ MSC, Me A 7.

‘Laid out for my Sister Mellish,’ which included the purchase of ‘a pare of Shamey gloves,’ ‘a black Crape Fan,’ ‘2 yards of plane Musling,’ ‘32 yards of Noriedge Crape,’ ‘14 yards of black Persion,’ and ‘a Gray apron fringed.’ Although Sarah noted in her own account book that she had ‘pd sister Mellish w^t she Laid out for me at London,’ and Dorothy similarly wrote that she had ‘Ended all accounts with my Sister Mellish at Blith 18: of August,’ Sarah never described these items herself.¹⁰¹ Money ‘laid out’ for family members was common practice in the Mellish accounts. Sarah laid out money for her ‘Sister Mellish,’ ‘Sister Baker,’ and ‘Sister Harvey,’ as well as various cousins, and Joan Mellish kept an account in the back of her book of money disbursed by her for others, as was as a note of when these accounts were paid.¹⁰² For instance, in April 1708 she wrote ‘Rec of my Daughter Harvey Money Disburs’d for her 15 yards stufe scots cloth stockings.’¹⁰³ The clothing of Joan Mellish’s granddaughter, Molly Harvey, also appears in both her father John Harvey and her grandmother’s accounts. Indeed, it seems that Joan also made purchases for Molly out of her own pocket, and it is likely that she was staying in her household at the time.¹⁰⁴ In 1706 Joan paid Mrs Smyth ‘for Making Molly Harvey gown and petecot,’ Nancy Parkinson for ‘making 4 shefts and Half for MH,’ and also purchased a pair of gloves for her. In 1705 her father noted paying for ‘Molly’s Manto & petticoat,’ as well as a ‘Manto 25 yards of sattanet silk’ for his other daughter Nancy.¹⁰⁵

Joan Mellish also ‘laid out’ money for Molly Harvey’s clothing on behalf of her son. In 1708 she described purchases of ‘Pladd for the Childrens Coats,’ ‘scotscloth for [Molly] Harvey Handk,’ and ‘Black Shallou[n] and ferret Ribband’ for a petticoat for Molly Harvey, which John Harvey paid her for later that

¹⁰¹ MSC, Me 2 E1, Me A 8.

¹⁰² MSC, Me A 8, Me A 7.

¹⁰³ MSC, Me A 7.

¹⁰⁴ BOR, WOM/2/4/1; MSC, Me A 7.

¹⁰⁵ MSC, Me A 7.

year.¹⁰⁶ ‘Proxy shopping,’ whereby men and women called on friends and family to undertake commissions of clothing and other goods, was widespread in the eighteenth century, and it is likely that many of the Mellish family purchases reflect this practice.¹⁰⁷ Both Helen Berry and Nicola Phillips, for example, have identified the consumption practices of the Durham gentlewoman Judith Baker, whereby she relied on a circle of family and friends to borrow money and acquire goods.¹⁰⁸ Miles Lambert has even argued that this ‘tried and tested system of familial commissioning’ carried more sentiment than did orders fulfilled by independent agents, servants, or tradesmen.¹⁰⁹ However, without any surviving correspondence – or ‘orders’ – it is difficult to determine how and why these purchases were undertaken, let alone how the accountant or proxy shopper felt about them. What these purchases *do* show us is that the Mellish family functioned as a unit of accounting. They recorded and accounted for purchases made for other family members, who sometimes lived within but also beyond the household.

The purchase and maintenance of an individual’s wardrobe could therefore become an entangled process, scattered across accounts and described by different people. For example, Sarah Mellish’s clothing appeared in the accounts of her mother and sister-in-law, while her ‘Sister Harvey’s’ clothing appeared in Sarah’s own accounts, as well as those of her mother and half-brother. The fact that the family’s accounts are inextricably intertwined is further demonstrated

¹⁰⁶ MSC, Me A 7.

¹⁰⁷ For further details of proxy shopping see Walsh, ‘Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England,’ 170; Tankard, “They tell me they were in fashion last year,” 20-41; Serena Dyer, ‘Shopping and the Senses: Retail, Browsing and Consumption in 18th-Century England,’ *History Compass*, 12:9 (2014): 694-703; Bridget Clarke, ‘Clothing the Family of an MP in the 1690s: An Analysis of the Day Book of Edward Clarke of Chipley, Somerset,’ *Costume*, 43:1 (2009): 38-54.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, *Women in Business*, 101-102; Berry, ‘Prudent Luxury,’ 146-47.

¹⁰⁹ Miles Lambert, “Sent from Town”: Commissioning Clothing in Britain During the Long Eighteenth Century,’ *Costume*, 43:1 (2009): 70-75.

by their obvious reliance on the same circle of suppliers and makers; Sarah Mellish paid bills to Mrs Lister, Mrs Yarwood, Mrs Stocker, and Mrs Faram (or Fayram) for textiles, clothing, and making, to Mr Shaw for shoes, and to Mr Martin for stays.¹¹⁰ Her mother paid one 'Mrs Lester for 3 quarts of Lace' in 1706, and John Harvey also recorded payments to Mrs Lister, Mrs Stocker, Mr Martin, Mr Shaw, and a Mr Faram.¹¹¹ Dorothy Mellish similarly 'Paid Mrs Stockers Bill' for her sister Harvey, and 'Mrs Yarwhood as by Bill' on behalf of Sarah.¹¹²

By looking at the account books of different women, I have suggested two general trends regarding the impact of the life cycle on expenditure on clothing; the first is that single women were likely to dedicate a higher proportion of expenditure to clothing than married or widowed women at the head of a household, and the second is that single women were responsible for clothing fewer dependents. I have also demonstrated that emphasis placed on the household is not appropriate for all women, as, though Sarah Mellish did not account for a household, she *did* account for family members. Moreover, the married Mrs Plumbe and the widowed Dorothy Chambers both accounted for family members as well as members of the household, reflecting that women could belong to and participate in more than one unit of accounting. In my discussion of Sarah Mellish's expenditure I also outlined some of methodological challenges involved in calculating expenditure on clothing – which, for that matter, apply to other types of expenditure as well. The next section in this chapter expands on this in more detail, but it is therefore worth making a few points here.

¹¹⁰ MSC, Me A 8.

¹¹¹ MSC, Me A 7; BOR, WOM/2/4/1.

¹¹² MSC, Me 2 E1.

The first is that we will never be able to calculate with absolute certainty an individual's expenditure on clothing from their account book. Not only are things often missed out, mistakenly recorded, or vaguely worded, but the very processes of accounting complicate this. As we have seen, accountants sometimes recorded paying a bill without specifying what it was for; when these payments were made to somebody they had previously purchased clothing from, we can assume that they refer to expenditure on clothing, but this can only ever be based on conjecture. Secondly, this might make us give pause and think about the usefulness of the numbers we extract from account books. I have tried to put this into context as far as is possible, relating expenditure on clothing to an accountant's yearly outgoings. However, the difficulties involved in calculating expenditure perhaps place limits on how much this can really tell us. Though we can never overcome these limitations, we need to remain aware of them. Finally, I argue that we need to stop thinking of account books in isolation. I expand on this in more detail in the third section of this chapter, but looking at the account books of the Mellish family gives us some idea of the relation these sources might bear to each other, as we find members of the family appearing across them. Of course, many account books only survive in isolation, and so it is not possible to establish a positive relationship with other sources, as I have done with the account books of Mellish family. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that, while a woman might have accounted for the clothing of family or household members, her own clothing may well have appeared in the account book of someone else.

Accounting and Describing

While the previous section focused on who and what women were accounting for, this section looks in detail at description. The description of clothing in the accounts of both men and women has frequently been interpreted as surprising

– and perhaps even unnecessary.¹¹³ In this context, detailed description has once again been read as evidence of the accountant's emotions, which are usually understood to revolve around delight, pride, and even anxiety.¹¹⁴ It is important to note that, unlike the description of clothing in women's wills, these arguments have most often been made about the account books of men, and so there may be some gendering of emotions at play here. For example, description in these books has been identified as evidence of pride or delight, rather than of sentiment. Nevertheless, even when no explicit link is made between description and emotion it has still been singled out as an area in which accountants were 'meticulous' and careful, perhaps even more so than in the sources discussed in the previous chapter.¹¹⁵

The minimum level of description required for accounting has never been established, and is an almost impossible (and most likely unproductive) task. Nevertheless, scholars tend to work on an assumption that detailed description somehow goes above and beyond this minimum. This is perhaps partly the result of a gap between the prescriptive literature and practice, as many manuscript accounts appear to use more detailed description than is outlined by these manuals. As we have seen, by the eighteenth century there were a number of printed 'how-to' accounting guides circulating, some of which provided model accounts for their readers. *Advice to the women and maidens of London* laid out a method of monthly bookkeeping by detailing imaginary expenditure for the month of January; in this month, the author lists purchases of, amongst other things, a 'hood, scarf, apron and gloves' costing 18s 6d, 'thred laces' costing 6d, a 'hood, tape, and thred' at 10s 3d, and 'a peticoat' which was the most expensive entry at £1 13s. 'Trolly Lace,' 'Riband,' and 'Calico and Sewing Silk' are also

¹¹³ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103; Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 12-13.

¹¹⁴ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103-104; Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 12-13.

¹¹⁵ For example, see Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life*, 198; Ehrman, 'Dressing Well in Old Age,' 29; Berry, 'Women, consumption and taste,' 202; Buck, 'Buying Clothes in Bedfordshire,' 317; Dyer, 'Trained to Consume,' 172; Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 12-13.

accounted for.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the 1745 *The Accomplish'd Housewife* provided readers with a sample account of one week's expenditure, which included the purchase of 'Thread, Silk, & Worsted.'¹¹⁷ As we shall see, the descriptions we find in manuscript account books *are* frequently more detailed than these examples seem to be. I would argue, however, that the assumption that detailed description is unnecessary also stems from an understanding of accounting as a factual and rational exercise. As Meridee Bailey has argued, the relationship between emotions and the economic sphere has been largely conceived as one in which emotion stands in contrast to rational economic decision making.¹¹⁸ Working on an assumption that there is a minimum level of description required for rational account keeping, anything which does not seem to fit this has therefore been interpreted as evidence of emotion.¹¹⁹

Looking at the women's account books introduced in the first section (Table 7), however, we can see that the detailed description of clothing was not remarkable. Rather, it was very much a part of women's accounting practices. Moreover, the descriptive language used in these books is shared with the two sources discussed in the first chapter. Between 1709 and 1717, for example, Sarah Mellish used thirty-seven different fabrics 188 times to describe cloth, clothing, and trimmings. The most popular fabrics in her account book were lace (as in 'a lace' or 'lace'), muslin, ribbon, sarsenet, ferret, and silk.¹²⁰ Seventeen of these same fabrics appear across the wills discussed in the first chapter, and twenty-five in the lost and stolen adverts.¹²¹ Like the wills and lost and stolen

¹¹⁶ Anon., *Advice to the women and maidens of London*, 4-7.

¹¹⁷ Anon., *The accomplish'd housewife*, 124.

¹¹⁸ Bailey, 'Economic records,' 110.

¹¹⁹ Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 277.

¹²⁰ Lace was used 22 times, muslin 21, ribbon 20, sarsenet 13, ferret 12, and silk 6; the rest of the fabrics were used less than 10 times each.

¹²¹ Shared with the wills: calico, calamanco, cambric, chintz, crape, dimity, flannel, gauze, Irish, lawn, lustring, muslin, sarsenet, satin, silk, stuff, and tabby.

advertises, Sarah Mellish also used ten colours to describe different items sixty-two times – with ‘white’ being used most frequently – and described things as quilted, worked, embroidered, striped, flourished, rich, fine, plain, and flowered.¹²² So, for instance, we find ‘my Black & white Calico [gown] & petticoat,’ ‘my black cloth manto,’ ‘my yellow cloaths,’ a ‘white sasnet hood,’ and ‘A white mbrodered Apron;’ examples of some of the fabrics she purchased are ‘blue persion,’ ‘blue silk,’ ‘Green stufe,’ ‘flourished muslin,’ and ‘Rich peach Colour Brocad.’¹²³ Her mother Joan Mellish similarly recorded buying ‘whit[e] Crape’ and ‘Calloroco spotted,’ while Dorothy Mellish purchased ‘fine flannel’ and ‘fine holland’ in 1705.¹²⁴

The descriptions found in the account book of Elizabeth Constable are also alike. Between 1752 and 1756, she used twenty-six different fabrics 128 times with ‘ribbon’ being used most frequently; this was followed by muslin, calamanco, and dimity.¹²⁵ Again, her account book shares fourteen of these fabrics with the wills, and sixteen with the lost and found adverts.¹²⁶ And, Elizabeth Constable also used colour and decoration to describe items. For example, she recorded payments for ‘black calamanco shoes,’ ‘white cotton stockings,’ and ‘dark gray

Shared with the newspaper advertisements: calico, calamanco, cambric, canvas, chintz, crape, dimity, feather, flannel, gauze, Holland, Irish, kid, lace, lawn, lustring, muslin, paduasoy, Persian, sarsenet, satin, silk, stuff, tabby, and worsted.

¹²² MSC, Me A 8.

It was closely followed by blue, green, black, and yellow. Other colours were ‘black & white,’ silver, pink, ‘peach-colour,’ and ‘green & gold.’

¹²³ MSC, Me A8.

¹²⁴ MSC, Me A7, Me 2 E1.

¹²⁵ Ribbon was used 30 times, muslin and calamanco were both used 12 times, and dimity was used 8 times.

¹²⁶ Shared with the wills: calico, calamanco, camblet, cambric, cotton, crape, damask, dimity, flannel, muslin, poplin, silk, satin, and stuff.

Shared with the newspaper advertisements: calico, calamanco, camblet, cambric, crape, cotton, damask, dimity, flannel, Irish cloth, lace, muslin poplin, satin, silk, stuff, and worsted.

Popling.¹²⁷ Again, the account books of Dorothy Chambers use a similar descriptive language. In the space of just one year between 1799 and 1800, she described twenty-six fabrics 128 times; as in the account book of Elizabeth Constable, ribbon was the most popular fabric, and was followed by silk, worsted, calico, and muslin.¹²⁸ Her accounts share twelve of these fabrics with the wills, and nineteen with the lost and found adverts.¹²⁹ Dorothy Chambers also used thirteen colours thirty-eight times to describe cloth and clothing, with white appearing most often, followed by black, green, and purple.¹³⁰

The descriptive language used by these women in their account books was readily available, as well as widely understood, and these descriptions would not look out of place in the pages of the wills and lost and stolen adverts discussed in the first chapter. They therefore act as a record of the variety of things available, as well as the language used to describe them, rather than of the accountant's emotion. Indeed, I conclude this chapter by arguing that it is likely that many of these descriptions were not authored by the accountants alone. Even the Latham family had access to a wide range of fabrics, especially in the years of the household's peak expenditure on clothing. Lorna Weatherill found check, fine,

¹²⁷ ERA, DDCC/153/20A/2.

She used seven colours 41 times, with black being the most popular. Items were also described as laced, striped, flowered, and bordered.

¹²⁸ MSC, Me A 11.

Ribbon was used 30 times, silk 9, worsted 7, and calico and muslin were both used 6 times. The other fabrics were all used less than 10 times.

¹²⁹ MSC, Me A 11.

Shared with the wills: calico, cambric, chintz, cloth, cotton, dimity, flannel, lawn, muslin, sarsenet, silk, velvet.

Shared with the newspaper advertisements: calico, cambric, canvas, cotton, chintz, cloth, dimity, fur, flannel, gingham, Holland, Irish, lace, muslin, Persian, sarsenet, silk, velvet, worsted.

¹³⁰ MSC, Me A 11, Me A 12.

Other colours were green, brown, buff, red, pink, 'dark blue,' silver, and yellow. She also used 'coloured' once.

woollen, linen, camblet, calamanco, tape borders, tamy, buckram, silk tape, and stuff purchased in 1747 alone. This, she writes, shows that the family had a number of different fabrics at its disposal ranging from 'finer cloths like check and fine linen, as well as small amounts of silk and lace, to ordinary hardwearing bratt, linen, and wool.'¹³¹

How items of clothing were purchased and paid for also impacts on how they described in the account books. Here, we turn back to the problems with calculating expenditure on clothing and textiles which I outlined in the first section of this chapter. Though I deliberately included items of clothing, purchases of textiles and trimming, and payments for making, mending, and altering clothing under the umbrella of 'expenditure on clothing,' the fact that these payments were recorded in different ways is significant. For example, smaller items of clothing like gloves, ruffles, stockings, and handkerchiefs were often purchased ready-made, and were most likely to be listed alongside other sundry items. In March 1799, for instance, Dorothy Chambers recorded a single payment of 4s 6d for a 'Cotton belt 2/ Ribbon 1/ Gloves 1/3 Biscuits /3.'¹³² Payments for these ready-made items also appeared more frequently than did payments for making clothing. Sarah Mellish's most regular clothing purchases were gloves, followed by fans, hoods, stockings, aprons, and handkerchiefs.¹³³ In contrast, payments to tailors, mantua makers, milliners, and others for making clothing were most often recorded as a single entry.

Sarah Mellish frequently recorded payments made to various people for 'making' clothing. In 1709, for example, she paid Mrs Hives 'for making my Black & white Calico Gound & petticoat.'¹³⁴ Joan Mellish similarly noted paying the

¹³¹ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xxvi.

¹³² MSC, Me A 11.

¹³³ MSC, Me A 8.

¹³⁴ MSC, Me A 8.

tailor for 'three dayes worke' in 1706, and in 1799 Dorothy Chambers paid for 'Making 3 shifts Mrs C' as well as paying 'Mrs Debb [the] Mantua maker.'¹³⁵ In April 1734, Mary Warde wrote in her account book that she had paid for 'A night gown making,' 'A white Petticoat making,' and 'A grey nightgown making.'¹³⁶ Of course, clothing might also be purchased second hand. In the Latham accounts, 'new' and 'old' appear with relative frequency and might suggest that the family purchased second hand clothing alongside new. For example, in 1734 Latham purchased 'new' shoes for his wife Nany but bought 'old stays for Sara' from the tailor John Wright.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, most of the female accountants looked at in this chapter do not appear to have purchased clothing second hand. Though Sarah Mellish occasionally described a garment as 'new' – in July 1713 she paid Mrs Hives for 'Altrenge my new Gound' – this was rare.¹³⁸

Textiles were usually purchased first, and were then sent to the tailor or mantuamaker to be made up into a garment. For instance, in June 1753 Elizabeth Constable recorded that she had 'Paid for gray India silk for a Night gowne,' and later 'D^o Paid for making the gowne & body lining' showing that these were two separate transactions.¹³⁹ Richard Latham's account book also shows a similar pattern, as he recorded payments for 'taylors worke' as well as purchases of fabric for his wife and daughters.¹⁴⁰ Sarah Mellish frequently recorded payments for various textiles, spending around £50 on the purchase of cloth alone in 1712 – a sizable portion of the £93 16s 10½d she had spent on her clothing in that year (Table 8). In the same year, she also recorded buying 'wosted,' 'muslin,' 'Green stufe,' 'Cambrick,' 'holland,' 'sasnet,' 'stripet Green

¹³⁵ MSC, Me A 7.

¹³⁶ WYASB, SpSt/6/2/1/1.

¹³⁷ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, sample for 1734.

¹³⁸ MSC, Me A8.

¹³⁹ ERA, DDCC/153/20A/2.

¹⁴⁰ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*.

satin,' 'pink sasnet,' and 'flourished muslin.'¹⁴¹ The cost of fabric was much higher than that of the labour that went into making a garment, and so while Elizabeth Constable's 'gray India silk' cost her £2 2s, she only paid 8s to have it made.¹⁴² As Susan Vincent has suggested, this process required a good knowledge of textile properties on the part of the consumer, as well as an understanding of how much fabric a garment would require.¹⁴³ In some instances, the accountant did specify why a textile had been purchased – in 1752 Elizabeth Constable, for instance, 'Paid for 14 yds of holland for shifts' – but often we are given no clue as to what garment was to be made from the fabric.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, it is probable that some of the textiles purchased were not destined to become part of the wardrobe at all. In 1800, for example, Mrs Chambers purchased two and a half yards of calico 'for lining [the] sofa' as well as 'Cloth for pudding bags,' reflecting that fabrics were also purchased for household use.¹⁴⁵

This distinction between ready-made and making is made explicit in the printed 'how-to' manual *A complete system of family book-keeping*, which was written by Adam Walker and published in 1745. In his exemplar accounts, Walker categorises expenditure on clothing under two different headings. The first, 'Mercery and Milanery,' lists items of clothing and textiles purchased from the mercer or milliner, as well as payments for making clothing. Here is included, amongst other things, 'Broad Cloth' bought from one Mr Harper at 18s a yard as well as 'Other Articles as per Bill of D^o,' 'A New Suit for Jackey' costing £2 17s

¹⁴¹ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁴² ERA, DDCC/153/20A/2; Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics,' 216; Anne Buck, 'Mantuumakers and Milliners: Women making and selling clothes in Eighteenth Century Bedfordshire,' *The Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society*, 72 (1993): 148.

¹⁴³ Susan Vincent, 'To Fashion a Self: Dressing in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Fashion Theory*, 3:2 (1999): 199.

¹⁴⁴ ERA, DDCC/153/20A/2.

¹⁴⁵ MSC, Me A 12.

10d, and 'Muslin' purchased from Mrs Knowles at 9s 6d for three and a half yards.¹⁴⁶ The second category is 'Apparel, &c.,' under which should be contained, in Walker's words, 'every Article of Apparel which comes not from the Mercer or Milaner.'¹⁴⁷ Here Walker lists items of clothing bought 'ready-made,' including 'Three Pair Silk Stockings,' 'A Furbelowed Stomacher,' and 'Three Pair Gloves.'¹⁴⁸ This distinction echoes that found in the accounting practices of the women looked at in this chapter, as entries for ready-made items were recorded differently to payments for textiles and making. In many of these prescriptive sample accounts, however, once expenditure on clothing has been recorded in this way it is subsumed under a wider category or categories; in *Advice to the women and maidens of London* the author writes that, once expenses have been recorded individually, accountants should 'sub-divide, and branch out this Account into as many parcels is convenient' in order that they may 'shew which way [their] Money goes.' This, they continue, will enable accountants to consider how they may 'lessen [their] Expences for the time to come.'¹⁴⁹ In the system of accounts presented in this manual, the author groups expenditure on clothing under the heading of 'Apparel,' and then calculates monthly and yearly expenditure on this category. In the sample accounts for January, £5 8s 7d – just under a quarter of total monthly expenditure – is listed as being spent on 'Apparel,' while 'Apparel' accounted for just over 20 per cent of the yearly expenditure.¹⁵⁰ This is a category which was to be monitored and controlled, however; *Advice to the women and maidens of London* urged readers to categorise their expenditure in this way so that they might consider how it might be reduced in the future, while Adam Walker warns that 'no one can be sensible whether they exceed or come short of that Part of their Income allotted for

¹⁴⁶ Walker, *A complete system of family book-keeping*, 9

¹⁴⁷ Walker, *A complete system of family book-keeping*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Walker, *A complete system of family book-keeping*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Anon., *Advice to the women and maidens of London*, 8-9, 16-18.

¹⁵⁰ Anon., *Advice to the women and maidens of London*, 8-9, 16-18.

Housekeeping, without the Practice of this necessary Art.’¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, we rarely find women employing this method in manuscript account books.

Though the supplier of a fabric and the maker of a garment might sometimes be the same person, these were often entirely separate transactions, and at each stage in this process an accountant could be issued with a bill. I turn to a detailed discussion of the relationship between bills, receipts, and accounts at the end of this section, but here I briefly consider the impact of this method of payment on the way in which clothing was described. As we will see, women recorded payments for making, mending, cleaning, or altering clothing, which they often referred to as ‘my.’ Sarah Mellish described payments for ‘altren my cloaths’ and ‘for altring my three Gowens,’ while her mother similarly recorded a payment to ‘Mrs Lester for making my Houd shute Musline’ in 1706.¹⁵² However, they also sometimes refer to garments in this way when they record the payment of a bill. In 1761, for example, Mrs Plumbe recorded the payment of ‘Mr Holdings Bill for My Gown’ and in August that same year she ‘paid Mrs Norris for making my Gown 2s [and] body lining 1s 3d.’¹⁵³ These entries reflect that these items were made for the accountant rather than purchased ready-made, as they record a payment for a service – for making – rather than the purchase of a garment. When recording the purchase of ready-made items, for example, Sarah Mellish does not use the word ‘my’ at all – she simply describes payments for ‘A Fan,’ ‘A Feather Muff,’ or ‘A white sercnet hood.’¹⁵⁴ Similarly, purchases of ribbons and trimming were unlikely to be referred to be described as ‘my’ in any of the account books. However, it is also possible that by the time a bill had been paid and entered into the accounts, the accountant might have already worn the

¹⁵¹ Walker, *A complete system of family book-keeping*, 11.

¹⁵² MSC, Me A8, Me A7.

¹⁵³ WYASB, Tong/5a/5.

¹⁵⁴ MSC, Me A8.

garment several times. And, as we shall see, there was often a considerable gap between the issue of a bill, and the payment of it.

Not all of the items of clothing described in these account books were newly purchased or paid for, though the majority were. As well as describing new additions, account books might also reflect the maintenance and upkeep of existing items of clothing in the accountant's possession. Ariane Fennetaux has argued that a renewed focus on the 'industrious stewardship of textile possessions' will offer a useful corrective to conceptions of the eighteenth century as a period of 'avid consumption and novelty,' and we certainly find some evidence for this in women's account books.¹⁵⁵ For instance, payments were frequently recorded for cleaning items which were not part of the regular linen wash. Gloves, gowns, and hoods in particular were washed less often than items like shifts and caps, and were made from fabrics which required specialist attention. Elizabeth Constable paid someone for 'scouring a white stuff pettecote' in 1753, for example, while Mary Warde paid for her 'gown turning' in 1734.¹⁵⁶ Turning was a technique used to lengthen the life cycle of a garment, whereby it was disassembled and the fabric turned inside out so that the worn side would become hidden.¹⁵⁷ We also find items of clothing being altered and mended; in 1706, Joan Mellish paid 'Mrs Smyth for making and mending the petecots' as well as for 'Lining A Mantow,' and in 1753 Elizabeth Constable paid one Mrs Powel 'for altering 2 gownes.'¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Sarah Mellish's account book reflects that, as well as adding to her wardrobe, she continued to maintain older items of clothing in her possession. Although she bought a new pair of stays almost every year between 1709 and 1716, she also paid to have a pair 'altered' in August 1709 and August 1713, and had a pair 'mended' in 1717.¹⁵⁹ Her

¹⁵⁵ Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics,' 122.

¹⁵⁶ WYASB, SpSt/6/2/1/1.

¹⁵⁷ Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics,' 128.

¹⁵⁸ MSC, Me A 7.

¹⁵⁹ MSC, Me A 8.

expenditure on shoes follows a similar pattern as she made frequent payments 'For mending my shoues,' as well as for purchasing new pairs. She never usually spent more than £1 in a year on mending or altering existing items of clothing, and the payments were usually around a few shillings; for instance, Mrs Hives was paid one shilling 'for altring my yalow petticoate' in 1712, and five shillings 'for Altren my yallow Gound & faceing ye Green white Twill' in 1713.¹⁶⁰

Sara Pennell has argued that these processes of maintenance and adaption were 'key virtues of the economic householder,' marking out the frugal and effective housewife from her 'spendthrift counterpart.'¹⁶¹ While 'mending' might have reflected a necessary expense, 'altering' could provide a relatively inexpensive way to refresh an existing item of clothing without recourse to a new purchase. Garments may have been altered to accommodate changing body shapes and sizes, but 'altering' could also suggest a change in the shape, style, and appearance of the thing itself. Frequent payments for textiles and trimmings such as lace, binding, ruffles, ribbon, and edging reflect that this was one way in which clothing could be easily updated. In 1715, for example, Sarah Mellish paid two shillings for 'new binding' a petticoat.¹⁶² And, as we have seen, ribbon was one of the most frequently purchased textiles by Sarah Mellish, as well as Elizabeth Constable and Dorothy Chambers; Chambers, for example, recorded at least thirty separate payments for 'a ribbon' or 'ribbon' between 1799 and 1800.¹⁶³ Despite a profound difference in income, both she and Sarah Mellish rarely spent over £1 on purchasing trimmings like ribbon and tape, only occasionally splashing out on more expensive laces and edging.¹⁶⁴ Although

¹⁶⁰ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁶¹ Sara Pennell, 'Material Culture in Seventeenth-Century "Britain": The Matter of Domestic Consumption' in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 78-79.

¹⁶² MSC, Me A 8; Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?' 880; Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 183-84.

¹⁶³ MSC, Me A 11.

¹⁶⁴ MSC, Me A 8, Me A 11.

these account books record payments made to other people for making, mending, and altering, they also hint at hidden practices of makeshift and economy which took place within the household. Victoria Kelley has highlighted that these processes were 'everyday, routine and repetitive' and so have left behind few records from which to study them.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, some purchases suggest that the accountant, or someone in the household, might have undertaken these tasks. Although she often paid for her making and mending, Sarah Mellish – like most of the other accountants looked at in this chapter – regularly purchased scissors, tape, thread, and sewing silk (though, of course, some of these materials may also have been used for embroidery).¹⁶⁶ Similarly, though Richard Latham recorded paying a halfpenny in 1744 for 'mending cloaths,' Lorna Weatherill has argued that needlework and mending remain largely absent in the Latham accounts as these practices took place within the home and 'required no payments;' clothing was altered by the family themselves, using the 'the small amounts of thread bought every year.'¹⁶⁷

It is therefore clear that purchasing and payment impacted on the way in which clothing is described in the account books, but I argue that the processes of accounting also played an important role in this. The emphasis that has been placed on description as a 'careful' or 'meticulous' proceeding invests it with deliberation on the accountant's behalf, and implies that this description exists in the account book alone. However, this overlooks the role of textual transmission. As Adam Smyth has outlined, the movement of notes from text to text was central to the practice of accounting, and it is therefore extremely likely that some women were recording in their account books a written – or even verbal – description which they had already seen or heard.¹⁶⁸ Curiously, though

¹⁶⁵ Victoria Kelley, 'Time, Wear and Maintenance: The Afterlife of Things' in *Writing Material Culture History*, 193-96.

¹⁶⁶ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁶⁷ Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xxvi.

¹⁶⁸ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 3-4; Dawson, 'Histories and Texts,' 415-22.

Smyth emphasises these processes of textual transmission, he is also still reads the description of clothing as evidence of emotion, as he argues that this implies Edward Dering's his 'delight' in his clothes.¹⁶⁹ I now turn to an analysis of bills issued to women for goods and services, in order to demonstrate that this was one way in which descriptions might be moved from text to text.

Bills and receipts have received some attention from scholars who use them as an alternative to, or as a supplement for, account books. Jon Stobart's study of Mary Leigh, for example, relies on an extensive set of receipted bills.¹⁷⁰ And, both Nicola Phillips and Helen Berry have investigated hundreds of bills and receipts left behind by the Durham gentlewoman Judith Baker, as well as her account books dating from 1749 to 1810.¹⁷¹ However, as a source bills remain on the whole curiously overlooked in studies of consumption. As we have seen, it is the account book which has been seen to yield the most useful insight into personal and household expenditure, which is perhaps partly because bills and receipts are understood to have a more indirect relationship with consumers. Clare Rose, for instance, has argued that the textual sources used for the study of eighteenth-century clothing fall into two categories – 'retailer-oriented and consumer-oriented.' Invoices belong to the first category and are 'mediated by the perceptions of retailers,' Rose suggests, while accounts and diaries belong to the second and grant more direct access to 'expressions of consumers' perceptions.¹⁷² This oversight in the scholarship might also stem from the fact that it is rare to find bills and receipts which match up with entries in account books. Though my argument is that descriptions of clothing were moved from one to the other, this is based on an analysis of bills for which no corresponding accounts survive. This approach is not unproblematic, but I argue that a general

¹⁶⁹ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103-104.

¹⁷⁰ Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle,' 85; Stobart and Rothery, 'Fashion, Heritage and Family,' 385-406.

¹⁷¹ Phillips, *Women in Business*, 95-119; Berry, 'Prudent Luxury,' 133-55.

¹⁷² Rose, 'Bought, stolen, bequeathed, preserved,' 118.

relationship between bills and account book can still be clearly demonstrated. Finally, in some instances the relationship between bills and account books may have been knowingly overlooked. We have already seen that this is the case in Smyth's study of Edward Dering, for example.¹⁷³ And, also writing on Dering, Sophie Pitman acknowledges that if he 'had the bill from his tailor in one hand and his pen in the other, it is possible that he copied the itemized lists of costs directly into the account book.' However, she continues, 'such precision and description' was unnecessary, and it is therefore more likely that he was revelling 'in the exuberant details of this new outfit.'¹⁷⁴ Establishing a relationship between bills and account books therefore sits uneasily alongside readings of emotions as evidence of description, as it calls the accountant's authorship into question. However, I argue that this not only demonstrates that description cannot be read in this way, but that an awareness of these processes of textual transmission is central to approaching account books as a source.

Though this has often been overlooked, it is clear that bills and accounts books did not exist in isolation from one another, but were rather parts of the same process. Sarah Mellish, for instance, frequently recorded paying 'bills' issued to her by various people.¹⁷⁵ Three sets of bills and receipts help shed light on this relationship; the first set belong to the Lady Emma Child, and date from 1686 to 1725.¹⁷⁶ 298 bills survive for this period, and were examined for the purchase of cloth and clothing as well as for making, mending, and cleaning. Lady Child's husband died in 1699 when she was in her mid-fifties, leaving her to manage

¹⁷³ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103-104.

¹⁷⁴ Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 13.

¹⁷⁵ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁷⁶ MSC, Family and Estate Papers of the Willoughby Family of Wollaton, Nottinghamshire, Middleton, Warwickshire, and Birdsall, Yorkshire, 12th-20th centuries, Mi Av 143/1/1-10, Mi Av 143/3/1-50, Mi Av 143/4/1-32, Mi Av 143/5/1-21, Mi Av 143/6/1-32, Mi Av 143/10/1-16, Mi Av 143/17/1-31, Mi Av 143/18/1-16, Mi Av 143/19/1-44, Mi Av 143/24/1-39, Mi Av 143/25/1-22, Mi Av 143/27/1-13, Household accounts and receipts for Lady Emma Child, 1686-1725.

jointure estates in Wollaton, Nottinghamshire, Middleton, and Warwickshire until her death in 1725. Lady Child is the most elite woman looked at in this thesis, which means that her consumption of clothing likely followed a different pattern to that of most of the women looked at thus far. Nevertheless, I have chosen to sample her bills both because of the number available, as well as the length of time that they span. The second set of 175 bills were issued to members of the Reade family between 1746 and 1752.¹⁷⁷ The Reades lived in Okeford Shilling in Dorset, where the Reverend Unton Reade served as vicar. He died in 1750, leaving behind a wife and daughter, and it is their bills for clothing and cloth which I look at in this section.

The final set of thirty-five bills were issued between 1778 and 1790 to Elizabeth Woodhouse of York, who married the Reverend John Forth in 1791.¹⁷⁸ Both Amanda Vickery and Serena Dyer have looked at the expenditure of Elizabeth Forth at different points in the life cycle, as a number of household account books dating from after her marriage survive. Dyer looks at her accounting practices as a married woman, while Vickery has studied her expenditure as a widow. Neither have looked in detail at the bills and receipts which survive for the years before Elizabeth Forth was married, though they do acknowledge them; Vickery notes that even before her marriage Elizabeth 'was practised in the art of keeping accounts,' while Dyer writes that accounts made before her marriage 'are not extensive, and are primarily made up of scattered bills and receipts.'¹⁷⁹ These three sets of bills were chosen because they date roughly from the beginning, middle, and end of the century, giving a broad chronological

¹⁷⁷ MSC, Estate and Official Papers of the Newcastle family of Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire, 1200-1941, Ne D 588/1-104, Ne D 589/1-71, Bundle of bills and receipts relating to the accounts of Mrs, Miss, and Reverend Reade, 1746-1751.

¹⁷⁸ EYA, Records of the Munby Family, 1743-1911, MFP/1/18, Receipts and bills for clothing for Miss Woodhouse, 1778-1790, MFP/1/22, Accounts for sundry items bought by Miss Elizabeth Woodhouse prior to her marriage.

¹⁷⁹ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 207-30; Dyer, 'Trained to Consume,' 171-76.

range. However, it is much rarer to find comprehensive collections of bills in archives than it is account books, and this has meant that two sets of bills stretch beyond Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire in their geographies.

Nevertheless, the three sets of bills are broadly representative of the diverse types of bills issued over the century. Most were simply written in pen and ink by the merchant themselves (Figure 5), but some bills combined print and handwriting as printed bill heads become more common over the course of the century (Figure 6). In many ways, the layout of a bill is similar to that found in account books, listing an item or service on the left-hand side of the page, its cost on the right, and a total at the bottom. Most bills also served as a receipt for a customer once they had been settled, with the merchant signing to confirm that they had received the payment. As Clare Rose had suggested, bills were ‘designed as claims rather than statements of value’ and prices were ultimately the result of negotiation between tradesperson and consumer.¹⁸⁰ For example, we often find small pennies knocked off the total of relatively high bills. In 1708, Emma Child paid £18 16s to Richard Houlditch and Anthony Self for a bill which was originally totalled at £18 16s 1¾d. This bill listed cloth purchased from August to December 1707, but was not recorded as paid until March 1708.¹⁸¹ There could be a gap of days, weeks, months, and even years between a bill being issued and its payment. Clearly, some accountants kept hold of these bills once they had been paid. Emma Childs even employed a system whereby she noted on the back of a bill what it was for, how much it cost, and when it had been settled. For example, the bill from Mr Houlditch for cloth purchased August to December 1707 has noted on the back ‘Mr Houlditch’s Bill for cloth, 27:16:-, pd 30 March 1708.’¹⁸² However, some women might have discarded these

¹⁸⁰ Rose, ‘Bought, stolen, bequeathed, preserved,’ 118.

¹⁸¹ MSC, Mi Av 143/3/12.

¹⁸² MSC, Mi Av 143/24/28.

Figure 5. Bill issued to Elizabeth Woodhouse, 4 December 1788, MFP/1/18.

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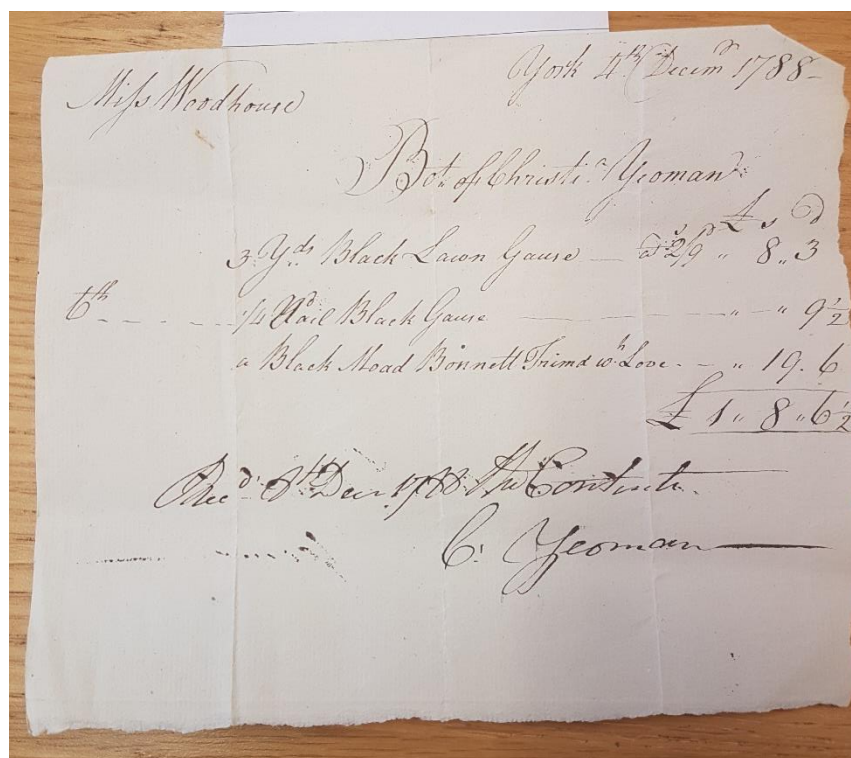
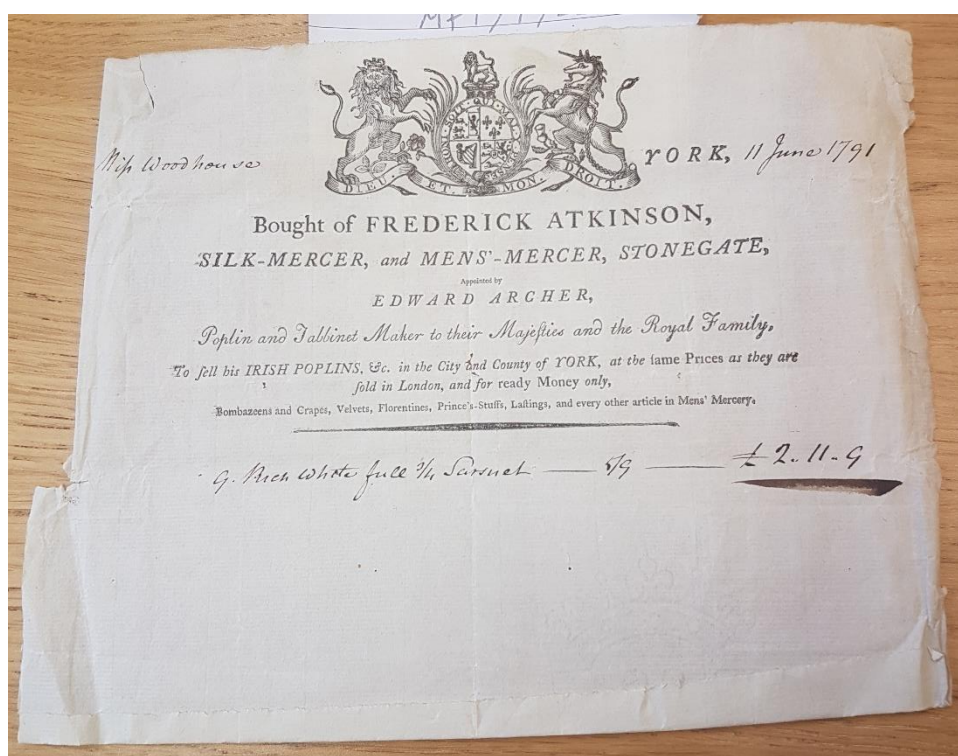


Figure 6. Bill issued to Elizabeth Woodhouse, 11 June 1791, MFP/1/22. Printed with permission from Explore York Library & Archives, York.



pieces of paper once the payment had been entered in their accounts. And, it is likely that many bills simply have not survived.

The three sets of bills all reflect the purchasing patterns evident in the account books. Bills were issued for the purchase of fabrics, ready-made items, and making, as well as mending, cleaning, and altering. If we look first at some of the bills of Emma Child, we can clearly see these different types of expenditure. On 9 April 1699 Dominick Morren issued her with a bill for 'making of a black Tabby stitch stays,' 'making of a black Damask stitch stays,' and 'For Altering of a pair of black tabby stays,' as well as for attending on her. The bill came to a total of £5 14s, and she paid him £5 10s on 29 May that same year.¹⁸³ In 1702 she received a bill from J. Languish 'For starch & mak your ladyships sute,' and one from Martha Hallansed in 1724 for 'making a chince manto' and 'making a demytee rapin gond [gown].'¹⁸⁴ And, in 1721 she purchased white buttons, black ribbon, white ribbon, a 'blac Girdle' and 'A Gause handkirechif' from Anne Clark.¹⁸⁵ The bills of Mrs and Miss Reade follow a similar pattern, although it was often one merchant who supplied multiple needs. A bill issued to Mrs Reade by Mary Lock for April to October 1750 listed thirty-five different purchases and payments, including 'for 2 Bonets,' 'for your Mourning Gown,' 'for Altren the Hoop,' 'for 6 Yeards of Stuff,' 'For Making your Gown,' 'for quilting the Coat,' 'for body linens,' 'for 1 silke Lase,' 'for turning your Black Coat,' and 'for Stuff and Mending your Gown.' The whole bill came to £3 13s 0¼d, and was paid in full on 12 October 1750.¹⁸⁶

Again, the bills issued to Elizabeth Woodhouse list similar expenditures. In December 1788, for instance, she purchased '3 yds Black Lawn Gause at 2/9' and

¹⁸³ MSC, Mi Av 143/3/35.

¹⁸⁴ MSC, Mi Av 143/6/2.

¹⁸⁵ MSC, Mi Av 143/19/16.

¹⁸⁶ MSC, Ne D 588/37.

‘a Black Moad Bonnett Trimd w^t Love’ from Christina Yeoman.¹⁸⁷ In 1791, she paid a bill of £4 5s 3¼d to Sarah Pick for a huge number of different things, including ‘Buff Callico Gown Making With Long Sleeves & brown Stomacher,’ ‘Muslinet Gown & Petticoat Making With Long Sleeves Full Trim’d,’ ‘Chintz Gown Making,’ ‘Muslin Gown Altering to new Stays,’ ‘White Silk Petticoat Making,’ ‘White Lustring Petticoat Making-Turning,’ and ‘Pink Stript Gown Making With Long Sleeves Full Trim’d.’ Also listed in the same bill were payments ‘for Washing Muslin,’ ‘Callico Gown Mended,’ and ‘Stript Callico Gown New Wasted.’ Elizabeth noted on the back of the bill in her own hand that these were ‘An Account of Sundry Articles bought when Mrs Forth was Married,’ which suggests that this significant outlay was intended to contribute towards a wedding trousseau.¹⁸⁸

As we can see, the descriptions we find in these bills are similar to those found in the account books looked at in this chapter, as items of clothing and textiles were described by colour, fabric, and decoration. When Sarah Mellish noted paying ‘Mrs Stocker Bill for my yallow cloaths making’ in 1712, it is therefore possible that Mrs Stocker’s bill read something along the lines of ‘for making your yellow clothes.’¹⁸⁹ Moreover, if we look at the purchase of fabric, we can see that it is highly likely that some of these descriptions were moved from a bill into an account book. In 1719, Emma Child paid one Bath Gill £13 10s as per her bill ‘For 9 yards of lace at 11s pr yard’ and ‘For 38 Ells of Holland at 4s 6le pr Ell.’¹⁹⁰ On 26 March 1720, Bath Gill issued her with another bill for ‘3 Ells & ¼ of Holland 6s 6le,’ ‘11 Ells of Ditto at 4s 4le,’ ‘3 yds 3 qrs ½ of Dimity at 1s 4le,’ and ‘17 yds of lace at 15s’ costing a total of £12 15s. Gill received full payment on the same day.¹⁹¹ In 1752, Mrs Reade paid part of a bill to John Thorne, which

¹⁸⁷ EYA, MFP/1/18.

¹⁸⁸ EYA, MFP/1/22.

¹⁸⁹ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁹⁰ MSC, Mi Av 143/19/19, Mi Av 143/19/25.

¹⁹¹ MSC, Mi Av 143/19/15.

covered expenditure from October 1750 to February 1751. This included, amongst other things, '3 Ells Holland [at] 6/,' '1 Yard Muslin 7/,' and '3 Yards Laceing [at] 3d.' The total bill came to £26 10s 11d, and Mrs Reade paid £14 10s towards it on the 10th March.¹⁹² And, in 1791 Elizabeth Woodhouse paid James Robson, linen draper, £1 8s 4d for '13 yds $\frac{3}{4}$ Irish Linen 18d' and '8 $\frac{3}{4}$ fine 7/8 D^o.'¹⁹³ Accountants similarly listed how much fabric they had purchased, as well as how many shillings and pence it cost per yard or ell, and it is most likely that they got this information from the bill they were issued with. In July 1709, for example, Sarah Mellish paid 'John Richardson for 28 yards of Holland at 5s pr yard,' and paid 'him more for 12 yards of silk at 3s 3le pr yard.'¹⁹⁴ In October 1755, Elizabeth Constable paid 3s 4d 'for 2 yds of cloath at 0:1:8 a yard,' and in October 1802 Dorothy Chambers recorded a payment for 'Eighteen yards Calico at 3/ Mrs C.'¹⁹⁵ She also purchased 'Four yards white Calico at 20d' in January 1803.¹⁹⁶

Though the absence of account books alongside these sets of bills means that we cannot prove a positive relationship between the two, the way that these bills were phrased, as well as the fact that the two sources use a shared language shows that this was one way in which descriptions were moved from text to text. This means that some of the descriptions of clothing found in account books were authored by merchants, rather than the accountant themselves. This again gives pause to readings of description as evidence of the accountant's emotion. Of course, not every description found in an account book might have been moved over from a bill, while accountants often simply recorded paying a 'bill' without giving any further detail. For example, entries in Sarah Mellish's account book include 'Mrs Yarwood her Bills in full,' 'Mrs Stockers Bill,' 'Mr Perkins his

¹⁹² MSC, Ne D 588/33.

¹⁹³ EYA, MFP/1/22.

¹⁹⁴ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁹⁵ ERA, DDCC/153/20A/2.

¹⁹⁶ MSC, Me A 11, Me A 12.

bill,’ and ‘Pd Mrs Hives bill.’¹⁹⁷ Moreover, accountants might also have copied descriptions over from their own notes or drafts. In a number of the account books, for example, we find purchases and calculations jotted in the back or on scraps of paper before being entered into the accounts proper. Looking at these processes of textual transmission therefore demonstrates that descriptions of clothing found in account books were not simply spontaneous expressions of emotion, nor were they unnecessarily careful or meticulous. This is also supported by the fact that many accountants seem to have recorded several days’ entries at once. All of this suggests that we need to rethink our emphasis on the account book. The bills looked at in this section show us that accounting was a process, and the account book simply one of – rather than the only – product of this.

Conclusion

Across all of the account books looked at in this chapter we find clothing belonging to individual women described by other people; mothers, sisters, fathers, cousins, mistresses, even merchants. While the detailed description of clothing in account books has repeatedly been called ‘careful’ or ‘meticulous,’ the very frequency with which it was used suggests that we need to rethink this. Again, these descriptions were not unusual or uncommon, nor were they unnecessary or superfluous – rather, they were very much a part of the accounting process for many women. Indeed, the account books and bills share a ‘common landscape of things’ with the sources I looked at in the first chapter, as well as a language used to describe them.¹⁹⁸ I argue that this language of description was as readily available to accountants as it was to willmakers. In this chapter, I have also demonstrated that we need to pay attention to the impact of the accounting process on these descriptions. Indeed, the difficulties

¹⁹⁷ MSC, Me A 8.

¹⁹⁸ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 165-67.

associated with calculating total expenditure on clothing across all of the account books in this chapter shows that we need to remain aware of this when approaching them as a source. Finally, I argue that by paying due attention to the processes of textual transmission associated with accounting, we once again find that description cannot be read as emotional. Here, we might also pay more attention to the material processes of accounting, which involved more than simply recording figures in an account book. Moving descriptions from bills into account books is just one example of this process, whereby the words recorded did not necessarily originate with the accountant themselves. Building on the discussion in the previous chapter, I argue that this once again demonstrates that we cannot read detailed descriptions in isolation as evidence of emotion.

The first two chapters of this thesis have therefore demonstrated that the detailed description of clothing has incorrectly been invested with emotion by scholars in three sources: wills, lost and stolen adverts, and account books. Description in these sources is also written about as ‘careful’ or ‘meticulous,’ when I have demonstrated that people were drawing on a widely available language with which they could describe their possessions, as well as those belonging to other people. Through detailed source analysis, I have shown that it is not possible to read descriptions of clothing in this way. However, I argue that we do not just need to stop looking to description in isolation for evidence of emotion, but that the scholarship on consumption needs to revise the way it approaches emotion in line with recent scholarship on the history of emotions. First of all, the terms used to describe women’s emotional engagement with their clothing are decidedly ill-defined and vague – it is ‘sentimental’ or ‘emotional,’ or has some sort of ‘emotional meaning.’ Secondly, scholars seem to search for glimpses or sparks of real or authentic emotion, often arguing that confirmation for this can be found in detailed description. However, this is something that can never be recovered; all the people of the past have left behind are traces of the representation and expression of emotion, rather than emotion itself. The second half of this thesis therefore turns to suggesting some

more productive approaches to looking at description, as well as the wider study of women's clothing.

Chapter Three:

Clothing and Conflict: The Separation of William and Catherine

Ettrick

Introduction

In March 1765, Catherine Ettrick began proceedings in the Durham Consistory Court in order to obtain a separation from her husband William; the couple had been married for over twelve years and had two children together, but an apparently explosive Christmas period in 1764 had provided the spark for her to leave him after years of allegedly cruel treatment. The resulting case would drag on for three years, be heard by two different judges in two different consistory courts, and would see the testimonies of sixty-four witnesses before Catherine was finally granted a separation. This came at a high price, however, with costs for the case reaching an enormous £355 by early 1768.¹ William and Catherine, who were both born in 1726, had been married in the Parish Church of St. Nicholas in Durham in 1752.² Catherine was the daughter of Robert Wharton Esq. of Bishop Auckland in the County of Durham, while William came from the Ettrick family of Sunderland and would later inherit the family estate at High Barnes.³ The marriage saw the birth of two children, a daughter named Catherine who was born soon after their marriage in 1752, and a son named

¹ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 48.

² William and Catherine's marriage settlement is held by TAW, Uncatalogued papers of the Ettrick Family of High Barnes, Sunderland, c. 1790-1860, DF.ETT 830/120, Marriage settlement of William Ettrick and Catherine Wharton, 1752.

³ TAW, Uncatalogued papers of the Ettrick Family of High Barnes, Sunderland, c. 1790-1860, DF.ETT 839/394, Ettrick family tree; Jeremiah Willam Summers, *Monwearmouth Shore, Fulwell, Hylton, and Southwick. From the Earliest Authentic Records Down to the Present Time. Vol. 1* (Sunderland: Joseph Tate, 1858), 186-96.

William who was born in 1757.⁴ The match had appeared to be advantageous for both families, but Catherine's suit for separation claimed that it had been an unhappy one, and that William's repeated 'cruel' and 'barbarous' treatment had finally driven her to leave him for good in early 1765.

As we will see, the Ettrick case played on many similar themes to those of other suits for separation in this period in terms of how both parties attempted to represent the behaviour of the other. However, in this chapter I shift the focus onto what it might be able to tell us about the role of women's clothing in the context of marital breakdown, as Catherine's clothing appears again and again in her own allegations, in William's response to them, and in the depositions of a number of witnesses. I do so by offering an in-depth case study of this suit for separation. This analysis is intended to be exploratory rather than offering any definitive conclusions, as I demonstrate what can be gained from using sources unfamiliar to the scholarship on consumption, and suggest a methodological approach which might usefully be applied to them. As we have seen, the use of court records as a source in studies of consumption is not new, as trials for theft have been effectively mined for details about stolen clothing.⁵ Indeed, trial records have been hailed as an essential corrective to 'static' lists of clothing found in sources like probate records and account books, as they can show us things in use.⁶ Giorgio Riello, for example, has argued that studies of inventories 'run the risk of resolving themselves into accounting, rather than a deeper sense of why, how and in what ways artefacts were used, enjoyed and appreciated in the past.'⁷ Frank Trentmann has similarly emphasised that the true value of a

⁴ TAW, DF.ETT 839/394, Ettrick family tree.

⁵ For example, see Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism,' 255-76; MacKay, 'Why They Stole,' 625; Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked," 28; Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age,' 1-25; Rose, 'Bought, stolen, bequeathed, preserved,' 114-20.

⁶ Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 7.

⁷ Riello, 'The Material Culture of Walking,' 54.

possession was based not in the object itself, but in how this thing was put to use.⁸ And, Danae Tankard has praised court depositions as the ‘most valuable’ source for looking at clothing, as they offer the historian a ‘dynamic view of clothing,’ while Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William Turkel argue that focusing on the things described in trials for theft shifts attention away from ownership at death, to more dynamic processes of ‘production, circulation, reception, use, and re-use.’⁹

Nevertheless, the role of clothing in other types of litigation has remained underexplored. As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, this is perhaps because trials which deal with theft seem to be straightforwardly about clothing in a way that other court records do not, and seem to confirm the existence of the things they describe. In contrast, clothing in other types of litigation is a more ambiguous blend of the real, the imagined, and the rhetorical; for example, in this chapter we find the same woman’s clothing being described in different ways. It has therefore been studies of marital breakdown which have noted the role clothing could play in this context, rather than the scholarship on consumption. If we look to records of suits for separation only for confirmation of what women owned, we must find ourselves disappointed; however, by bringing the scholarship on consumption together with that on marital breakdown, I demonstrate that these records can prove valuable sources for the study of women and their clothing. Rather than worrying about whether or not the things described in these suits were real, I instead explore *how* and *why* clothing was used in the Ettrick case. This responds to calls to explore things in use, as I turn to a discussion of clothing in use and movement in the second section of the chapter. However, I also argue that we need to look to how

⁸ Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History,’ 297-98.

⁹ Tankard, “A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings,” 7; Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, ‘Rethinking inventories in the digital age,’ 2.

descriptions of clothing were being used in the narratives presented in court, as well as the role clothing played in shaping these narratives.

The role of clothing has been noted by a number of studies of early modern and eighteenth-century marital violence and breakdown, but it is usually conceived of as having significance primarily in terms of the destruction or deprivation of clothing which, it is argued, was most often undertaken by husbands against their wives.¹⁰ Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese, for example, have written that 'one of the most frequent complaints made in cruelty cases before the ecclesiastical courts was that husbands economically deprived their wives' by withholding 'basic necessities' like food, clothing, shelter, and medical care.¹¹ They also suggest that the destruction of clothing was considered to be a serious form of cruelty by both litigants and witnesses, convincingly arguing that such acts 'which literally tore and damaged clothing figuratively damaged spouses in crucial ways.'¹² This destruction and deprivation is understood to have been particularly damaging for women who not only relied on their husbands to provide for them, but who, despite the legal strictures of coverture, had a sense of ownership over their clothing. It is now accepted that in practice coverture did not prevent married women from regarding property as belonging to them rather than their husbands, and that women did not suspend a sense of ownership over their possessions during marriage.¹³

¹⁰ For example, see Bailey and Giese, 'Marital cruelty,' 289-305; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*; Fay Bound, 'Emotion in Early Modern England, 1660-1770: Performativity and Practice at the Church Courts of York' (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2000); Margaret Hunt, 'Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Gender & History*, 4:1 (1992): 10-33.

¹¹ Bailey and Giese, 'Marital cruelty,' 295.

¹² Bailey and Giese, 'Marital cruelty,' 297.

¹³ Amy Louise Erickson, 'Possession – and the other one-tenth of the law: assessing women's ownership and economic roles in early modern England,' *Women's History Review*, 16:3 (2007): 370; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 100-102; Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 361.

These two themes – deprivation and, to a lesser extent, destruction – do play a significant role in Catherine’s allegations of cruelty against her husband, which also reflect that she did indeed feel ownership over certain goods. This chapter does not seek to suggest otherwise, nor does it aim to argue that these themes did not play an important role in constructing Catherine’s case for separation – or in that of any other woman. Indeed, Catherine’s allegations clearly drew on established cultural and legal understandings of acceptable behaviour within a marriage, as well as the material expectations of this relationship. Nevertheless, I argue that conceiving of the role of clothing only in terms of deprivation and destruction is not the only useful approach, and is also at risk of reducing the role of clothing to one which is simply illustrative of cruelty. As Fay Bound has argued, marital experience was ‘embedded in and articulated through material culture and the world of goods,’ and clothing had an active role in shaping and representing it.¹⁴ Moreover, despite asserting wives’ sense of ownership over their clothing, previous studies have tended, consciously or unconsciously, to reduce it to a tool for the exercise and representation of patriarchal power. Margaret Hunt, for example, has claimed that husbands ‘used their property rights and their economic security as weapons.’¹⁵ Though Catherine’s husband used her clothing to support his allegations against her, she was also able to use it to support a positive representation of herself.

But what does focusing on the Ettrick case alone offer? It has been looked at by other scholars writing on the records of the York Consistory Court, most notably by Joanne Bailey and Elizabeth Foyster, who have both offered some of the most in-depth studies of marital violence and breakdown to date.¹⁶ The details of the

¹⁴ Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England,’ 205.

¹⁵ Hunt, ‘Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women’s Independence,’ 18-19.

¹⁶ Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England,’ 205; Joanne Bailey, ‘Voices in court: lawyers’ or litigants?’ *Historical Research*, 74:186 (2001): 393-94; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 116; Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24, 51, 58, 76, 139, 154.

case are therefore well-known in the scholarship. However, in these studies, which analyse a high volume of contemporary suits, these details have been employed in order to illustrate wider themes, rather than as a case study in its own right.¹⁷ As I have said, it does follow many similarities with other suits for separation in the period reflecting that there existed shared cultural and legal understandings of what did and did not constitute acceptable behaviour within a marriage. Violence often formed a key part of suits for separation, with wives claiming that their husbands' abuse followed an unpredictable and irrational pattern; Joanne Bailey has argued that we should reject the phrase 'domestic violence' as anachronistic for the early modern period, as this violence was not confined to the home, and nor can this space be defined as private.¹⁸ I therefore employ the term 'marital violence' here. Chief amongst Catherine's allegations against her husband, for example, was that he would 'suddenly' fall into 'Passionate Fitts of Frenzy or Madness' and 'beat her Severely,' or threaten to do so.¹⁹ It is often assumed that the only recourse for a wife hoping to obtain a separation was to prove 'extreme cruelty' which left her in fear of her life, and scholars looking at marital violence have therefore focused on defining what level of cruelty provided adequate evidence of this. This has resulted in an account of 'changing judicial attitudes towards marital cruelty,' which argues that from the mid-eighteenth century church courts were willing to categorise a

See also Joanne Bailey, 'Reassessing Parenting in the Eighteenth Century' in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ For example, see Bound, 'Emotion in Early Modern England,' 179, 183, 187, 191-92, 198; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 46, 83, 94, 116, 135-36; Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 24, 51, 58, 76, 139, 154.

¹⁸ Joanne Bailey, "I dye [sic] by Inches": Locating wife beating in the concept of a privatization of marriage and violence in eighteenth-century England,' *Social History*, 31:3 (2006): 277.

¹⁹ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, TRANS.CP.1765/4, Ettrick v. Ettrick, transcription of the original proceedings in Durham Consistory Court, 1765.

much wider range of acts beyond life-threatening violence as 'cruel.'²⁰ Elizabeth Foyster, for instance, has argued that by the nineteenth century 'levels, forms and ways of violence that would have been tolerated' in the seventeenth century 'were regarded as unbearable or repugnant.'²¹ This shift has been attributed to changing manners and the growth of politeness and sensibility, but scholars have differed in their interpretations of its impact. Margaret Hunt has taken the pessimistic view that increasing condemnation of marital violence simply served to drive it behind closed doors, while David Lemmings has argued that, despite appeals for husbands to observe new standards of civility and reason, wives continued to be disadvantaged by a patriarchal 'double standard.'²²

In one article, Elizabeth Foyster puts a more optimistic spin on this alleged shift, arguing that new 'codes of politeness' brought about changing expectations surrounding marriage which allowed wives to insist upon 'new standards of behaviour from their husbands.'²³ However, recent scholarship has shown that attitudes towards marital violence do not neatly correlate with a growth in the popularity of politeness and sensibility, and that non-violent behaviour was not newly entered into categorisations of cruelty in the mid eighteenth-century; Garthine Walker has criticised this tendency to separate physical and non-physical violence, when early modern legal and cultural understandings saw 'aggressive words and gestures not as separate categories, but to lie upon a

²⁰ David Lemmings, 'Women's Property, Popular Cultures, and the Consistory Court of London in the Eighteenth Century' in *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, 79; Bailey and Giese, 'Marital cruelty,' 290.

²¹ Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 235.

²² Hunt, 'Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence,' 15-26; Lemmings, 'Women's Property, Popular Cultures, and the Consistory Court of London,' 79.

²³ Elizabeth Foyster, 'Creating a Veil of Silence? Politeness and Marital Violence in the English Household,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002): 399, 403.

continuum of violence.’²⁴ In a study of the York church courts, Fay Bound has shown that no suit for separation rested on physical violence alone, and Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese have written that litigants and witnesses in both the sixteenth as well as the eighteenth century ‘identified a combination of intimidating and contemptuous acts – such as physical violence, marital neglect, and verbal abuse – as forms of marital cruelty.’²⁵ They attribute this flexible definition as benefitting legal practitioners in particular, who defined acts of cruelty according to the social status of the couple – a higher ranking and ‘more sensitive wife,’ they argue, would be endangered by less violent abuse than a woman of the labouring classes.²⁶ The impact of this ambiguous definition of violence on the behaviour of husbands, however, is less clear. Frances Dolan has argued that it benefitted men by permitting them to employ ‘reasonable force’ in order to control their wives and subordinates, but Jennine Hurl-Eamon has suggested that it may in fact have caused uncertainty for patriarchs attempting to determine appropriate levels of violence.²⁷ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that violence against wives was often seen to have an accepted place in marital relationships.²⁸

Catherine Ettrick’s original suit for separation in the Durham Consistory Court made a number of allegations of cruelty against her husband. As well as physical

²⁴ Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 23.

²⁵ Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England,’ 185; Bailey and Giese, ‘Marital cruelty,’ 295, 301.

²⁶ Bailey and Giese, ‘Marital cruelty,’ 290.

²⁷ Frances E. Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 83; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, ‘“I Will Forgive You if the World Will”: Wife Murder and Limits on Patriarchal Violence in London, 1690-1750’ in *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. Joseph P. Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 237.

²⁸ Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 81; Elizabeth Foyster, ‘Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating in Late Stuart England,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996): 223-24. See also Joanne Bailey, ‘Reassessing Parenting in the Eighteenth Century’ in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

violence, it alleged that he also made frequent threats of violence against her, and would 'abuse her and her whole Family and Curse and Swear at her.'²⁹ He apparently put her in fear of her life by frequently taking her out for a drive in a single horse chaise and 'overturning' it, so much so that she claimed that 'she was advised by all her Neighbours and Friends not to go into the Chaise any more.'³⁰ When Catherine tried to ride out alone in order to improve a 'very bad state of Health' caused by his 'ill usage and Cruel Treatment,' she claimed that he would beat and strike her mare so that it would throw her off, as he hoped that 'it would break her Neck.'³¹ Her allegations all stressed the frequency of this behaviour, emphasising that William's cruelty occurred repeatedly and often. They also implied that she was not the only one affected by William's cruel behaviour. As Joanne Bailey has argued, in suits for separation the irrationality of abusive husbands was 'most forcefully illustrated by their behaviour towards their wives during pregnancy and child-birth and towards their children.'³² Catherine's suit claimed that William had driven her dangerously in the chaise while she was pregnant, forced her to undertake a visit to their neighbours the day before the birth of their daughter, and refused to fetch any assistance for her once her labour had actually begun.³³ She later claimed that his 'Cruel usage of her' had brought on an early labour.³⁴

William's cruelty towards his children apparently continued after they were born, as Catherine alleged that he refused to see them when they were infants,

²⁹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³⁰ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³² Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 116.

See also Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 129-67.

³³ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³⁴ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, CP.I.1503, Ettrick v. Ettrick, The Personal Answers of Catherine Ettrick the Wife of William Ettrick, 1767-1768.

and would beat them often and spit in their faces as they grew older; he allegedly forced his son to go without breakfast before a two-mile walk to school, and threw his daughter out of their carriage and forced her to walk for miles on her own.³⁵ As I have already said, William's alleged cruelty also extended to Catherine's clothing. Witnesses in Catherine's support claimed that they had seen William make threats against and destroy it, while Catherine herself alleged that he had withheld it from her after she left him.³⁶ The servants Mary Beadnell and Thomasine Walker deposed that they had heard him threaten to 'Lay her Cloaths' upon the fire, and Walker stated 'that she hath once or twice seen Mr. Ettrick throw her Mistress's Linnen out of their Bed Chamber Windows.'³⁷ It was therefore not just marital violence which was presented as cruel in Catherine's allegations, but a whole host of behaviours. Although the case took place in the mid-eighteenth century, in this it followed a similar pattern to both earlier and later suits for separation in this period. What constituted cruel behaviour was also defined by her status, and I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter by comparing the Ettrick suit to a trial for murder. In many ways, then, the Ettrick case reflects a number of wider tropes also found in contemporary suits for separation.

In other ways, however, the Ettrick case is atypical. For a start, many suits in the church courts were simply abandoned before they came before a judge as the threat of action was often enough to make defendants settle the issue out of court.³⁸ Initiating a suit was not particularly expensive, and Laura Gowing has

³⁵ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³⁶ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

³⁸ Phillippa Hoskin, Simon Sandall and Emma Watson, 'The Court Records of the Diocese of York 1300-1858: An Under-Used Resource,' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 83:1 (2011): 149; Christine Churches, 'Putting Women in Their Place: Female Litigants at Whitehaven, 1660-1760' in *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, 59; Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 184.

argued that it was actually the 'narratives of litigation themselves' rather than a final sentence which 'carried the weight of dispute' and brought suits to a resolution.³⁹ If a suit for separation on the grounds of cruelty went ahead, however, it could require detailed allegations and responses, the examination of numerous witnesses, and could drag on for months, or even years; Lawrence Stone has estimated that a contested suit could take up to two years, with the average lasting a year and half.⁴⁰ At three years, the Ettrick case exceeded this upper limit and was also exceptional in the high number of witnesses who were called. Stone cites one of the longest cases on record – a nullity case on the grounds of insanity – which required forty-one witnesses, whereas the Ettrick case saw the depositions of sixty-four different witnesses over the course of three years.⁴¹

This also had implications in terms of cost; Joanne Bailey found that one of the cheapest suits for separation on the grounds of cruelty in the period 1660 to 1800 lasted for one year between 1745 and 1746, and cost just £4 4s.⁴² In contrast, the Ettrick case had racked up costs of £335 by early 1768.⁴³ As David Lemmings has noted, litigants who were able to maintain these expensive suits for a long period of time were relatively wealthy, often belonging to merchant or professional families.⁴⁴ Although she points out that members of the lower middling and labouring classes could and did use the church courts, Joanne Bailey found that nearly sixty per cent of the husbands involved in matrimonial suits heard in the York, Durham, and Oxford belonged to the titled elite, gentry, or to the professional classes, with forty per cent having an annual income over

³⁹ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 48; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 42-43.

⁴⁰ Foyster, 'Creating a Veil of Silence?' 400-401; Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 197.

⁴¹ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 197.

⁴² Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 48.

⁴³ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 48.

⁴⁴ Lemmings, 'Women's Property, Popular Cultures, and the Consistory Court of London,' 77.

£200.⁴⁵ The Ettricks' ability to sustain this case for so long, with William appealing Catherine's original suit in the consistory court of York, reflects their wealth and status. This is corroborated by the size of Catherine's marriage portion of £2000; Amy Erickson calculated the value of early modern marriage portions, and found that women from the upper gentry and the minor titled aristocracy brought portions between £1,000 and £5,000 to their marriages, while the county gentry's ranged from £100 to £1,000.⁴⁶ Though inflation meant that by the eighteenth century manufacturers and professionals had begun to appear in Erickson's 'county gentry' bracket, the size of Catherine's portion still places her firmly as a member of the gentry.⁴⁷ Indeed, this is something her allegations and personal answers stressed.

As well as being unusual in terms of its cost and length, the Ettrick case was one of a declining number of suits for separation on the grounds of cruelty brought in front of the church courts in this period. Joanne Bailey found that, of the forty-seven cases which came before the York and Durham consistory courts between 1660 and 1800, just under a quarter were heard between 1750 and 1800.⁴⁸ This is partly reflective of a general decline in the business of the church courts, but also shows that in this period there existed a number of other avenues for dealing with marital conflict and breakdown. As Margaret Hunt has noted, the 'small but steady stream of middling and elite men and women who sued for legal separation in diocesan ecclesiastical courts...were but one small part of this

⁴⁵ Bailey's data is for the years 1660 to 1800; she found that out of 119 men, 49 belonged to the titled/gentry classes, 20 to the professional classes, 20 had middling-sort occupations, 7 had an annual income over £50 and under £200, 18 had an annual income under £50, and 5 belonged to the rural/agricultural labouring classes.

Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, Appendix 5, 209.

⁴⁶ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4; Erickson, *Women and Property*, 86-89.

⁴⁷ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 85-96.

⁴⁸ 77% were heard between 1660 and 1750, and 23% between 1750 and 1800.

Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 124.

phenomenon' as individuals and couples turned to lawyers to negotiate private separations, or to the common law courts, borough courts, and local courts of request to initiate suits for conjugal support, unpaid dowries, or damages and defamation.⁴⁹ Some women went to their local Justices of the Peace in order to warn their abusive husbands not to continue with this behaviour, as Catherine herself did in January 1765 before she began her suit for separation.⁵⁰ Finally, some married couples simply began living apart, without following any formal legal process for separation.⁵¹ Suits for separation in the church courts, like that brought by Catherine Ettrick, therefore reflect just one small part of a wider context of marital conflict and breakdown.

What Catherine sought from the church courts was a 'separation from bed and board' from her husband, which did not allow either party to remarry, but did allow them to legally separate and live apart. It also meant that the courts administered a financial settlement, which usually involved a husband paying his wife a regular allowance.⁵² The process of these suits was central to the documents it generated. They began with the plaintiff – in this instance Catherine Ettrick – appointing a proctor, who then brought their complaint before the court. On the judge's order letters of citation were drawn up summoning the defendant – in this case William Ettrick – to appear before him to hear the charges. This was often enough to make many defendants agree to settle the case out of court.⁵³ If the defendant decided to contest the case,

⁴⁹ Margaret R. Hunt, 'Wives and marital "rights" in the Court of Exchequer in the early eighteenth century' in *Londinopolis*, 109-10.

⁵⁰ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁵¹ Joanne Bailey, 'All he wanted was to kill her that he might marry the Girl': Broken marriages and cohabitation in the long eighteenth century' in *Cohabitation and Non-Marital Births in England and Wales, 1600-2012*, ed. Rebecca Probert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 52.

⁵² Hoskin, Sandall, and Watson, 'The Court Records of the Diocese of York 1300-1858,' 160.

⁵³ Hoskin, Sandall, and Watson, 'The Court Records of the Diocese of York 1300-1858,' 149.

however, they appointed their own proctor. The plaintiff then gave the court a written 'libel,' which contained articles listing the allegations against the defendant, who then made an answer to the accusations. After this, the court took the depositions of the witnesses named by both parties and, although there were no cross-examinations, the defendant could prepare a list of 'interrogatories' which posed questions to the witnesses. The depositions of the witnesses were not presented in front of the court. Instead, witnesses were examined in private, and were read the articles in the plaintiff's libel and asked to comment on them. Their responses were written down by a notary.⁵⁴ They were then examined for a second time, in order to reply to the written interrogatories supplied by the defendant.⁵⁵

After the witnesses had given their depositions, a copy of their written statement was submitted to the judge for consideration in the case. Then, a day was appointed for the hearing, and the two proctors appeared in court and spoke for their clients. Finally, the judge delivered his sentence in open court. After 1752 the sentence was accompanied by a declaration of the judge's reasoning, but these speeches were not recorded in the files of the court.⁵⁶ If they were unhappy with the outcome, the defendant could appeal the sentence to a higher court – as William Ettrick did in the consistory court of York – and the process began again.⁵⁷ Each stage of this process generated written documents, and so it is possible for a huge amount of paperwork relating to a suit to survive. In the Ettrick case, this includes the plaintiff's libel which stated Catherine's case, the defendant's – or William's – 'personal answers' to this libel, 'allegations' which set out his counter case, additional allegations or positions from both parties, supporting documentation submitted as evidence by both parties, the

⁵⁴ Hoskin, Sandall, and Watson, 'The Court Records of the Diocese of York 1300-1858,' 150.

⁵⁵ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 195-97.

⁵⁶ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 195-97.

⁵⁷ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 32.

witness depositions, and ‘interrogatories’ presented by the defendant.⁵⁸ These documents form the core of this chapter, though I draw most heavily on a transcription of the original proceedings for Catherine’s original suit in the Durham Consistory Court. This transcription was sent to the York Consistory Court in 1765, on William’s appeal.⁵⁹ These sources are supported by research into the Wharton and Ettrick family papers held by the Tyne and Wear Archives, Special Collections at Durham University, and by the Dorset History Centre.

Church court records can therefore provide ‘specific, detailed and extensive’ accounts but, as Joanne Bailey has argued, this brings along with it a number of ‘interpretive problems.’⁶⁰ Historians have taken different approaches to reading these sources, but have usually focused on the witness depositions. Some have approached them in an attempt to discern the level of accuracy and reliability they can offer. Lawrence Stone, for example, has written that, although ‘vital pieces of evidence’ are often missing from these sources, we should understand them as generally reliable accounts which are ‘astonishing in their completeness and intimate detail.’⁶¹ Margaret Hunt has taken a more critical approach by arguing that giving evidence prompted witnesses ‘to speak in moral absolutes and to shape narratives around generally accepted behavioural norms,’ but still notes that the ‘resulting stories are manifestly full of lies, omissions, temporal transpositions and eccentric interpretations of events.’⁶² As a response to this, other scholars have taken on the role of ‘translators’ in recognising that these depositions were mediated by legal processes, and therefore cannot offer a

⁵⁸ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1461, CP.I.1475, CP.I.1476, CP.I.1480, CP.I.1495, CP.I.1503, CP.I.1504, CP.I.1505, CP.I.1506, CP.I.1525, CP.I.1530, CP.I.1531, CP.I. 1535, CP.I.1536, Records relating to Ettrick v. Ettrick, Appeal, Separation from bed and board on the grounds of cruelty, 1764-68.

⁵⁹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁶⁰ Bailey, ‘Voices in court,’ 393-94.

⁶¹ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 32.

⁶² Hunt, ‘Wives and marital “rights,”’ 112-13.

‘truthful’ version of events. They instead seek to ‘decode the symbol and form of their language,’ and identify an ‘authentic’ voice amongst the legal jargon.⁶³

Thus, Laura Gowing has emphasised the importance of paying full attention to the circumstances of production when approaching depositions, as these stories were ‘the composite product of a series of reworkings.’⁶⁴ She notes the central role of proctors in making ‘comprehensive legal narrative[s]’ out of the evidence given by witnesses, but argues that in many of these testimonies the ‘formulaic phrases of the clerical style mingle with words and phrases that look as if they were remembered, and recorded, in their original detail.’⁶⁵ Like the wills discussed in the first chapter, the authentic voice of an individual is therefore seen to leap out from between dry legal phrases.

Joanne Bailey, however, has been critical of this approach, singling out a tendency for ‘translators’ to imply that the legal process simply offers an obstacle ‘between the historian and facts.’⁶⁶ She has instead called for church court records to be read alongside legal correspondence and other sources – wills and inventories, for example – in order to explore the public and private sides of litigation. This, she argues, not only reflects that the church court records ‘cannot be taken at face value,’ but also illustrates that litigants and defendants could play an active role in shaping the way that a suit progressed through court.⁶⁷ I have drawn as far as is possible on the surviving papers of the Ettrick family in this chapter, but little correspondence survives between Catherine and her legal representatives, and so we cannot know how active she was in shaping the narratives presented in court. I have only found one letter from her relating to the case, which dates from May 1767. Though she had won

⁶³ Bailey, ‘Voices in court,’ 407.

⁶⁴ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 41-42.

⁶⁵ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 45, 47-48.

See also Joanne McEwan, ‘Judicial sources’ in *Early Modern Emotions*, 112.

⁶⁶ Bailey, ‘Voices in court,’ 407.

⁶⁷ Bailey, ‘Voices in court,’ 395-97.

her original suit in the Durham Consistory Court, at this point her husband was appealing the decision. In this letter, Catherine thanks a Mr. Balby for 'a sight of the inclosed' and writes that her proctor John Clough 'will do all in his power to expedite the Cause to get my Alimony advanced as soon as may be.'⁶⁸

As these different methodological approaches reflect, the narratives presented in the allegations, responses, and depositions of suits brought before the church courts do not offer easy access to the voices of the past, as they are constructed in order to fulfil a specific purpose: establishing the guilt – or innocence – of one party. The most successful readings of these sources so far have therefore been those which recognise that they cannot be divorced from the circumstances in which they were produced, but that they can also provide evidence of shared cultural, legal, and moral understandings. As Garthine Walker has argued, 'accounts of subjective, personal experiences are produced and made sense of within available collective, cultural meanings.'⁶⁹ Though I offer an in-depth study in this chapter, it is clear that the narratives presented by both Catherine and William Ettrick were appealing to wider cultural and legal expectations of behaviour within a marriage. Nevertheless, though scholars have emphasised the importance of paying attention to the legal processes by which these documents were created, a number of studies tend to collapse the boundaries between different documents in their search for evidence of shared understandings. Studies of marital violence, for example, have tended to focus largely on the libel presented on behalf of the wife, or to conflate allegations made by the plaintiff with witness depositions.⁷⁰ However, as this chapter will demonstrate, different narratives were presented in court in these suits.

⁶⁸ SCD, Durham Diocesan records: episcopal jurisdiction, 1531-1999, DDR/EJ/PRC/2/1767/9, letter from Catherine Ettrick to Mr Balby, 12 May 1767.

⁶⁹ Garthine Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England,' *Gender & History*, 10:1 (1998): 3.

⁷⁰ For example, see discussion of Catherine Ettrick's defence in Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 94.

In this chapter I therefore recognise the circumstances in which these records were produced, but I also distinguish between the different types of documents which survive for the case. Moreover, I take an approach which recognises that the narratives presented in court were constructed for a specific purpose, especially in the context of documentation supplied on behalf of the plaintiff or the defendant – for example their allegations, responses, or interrogatories. I do so by exploring how one woman's clothing was used as evidence in two opposing narratives. This is not to argue that the accounts presented in court were fictitious – and nor is it to deny in any way that early modern women often faced cruelty and violence from their husbands, much of which has gone unrecorded. Indeed, as we will see in chapter four, many women who faced abuse did not have access to the resources Catherine Ettrick was able to mobilise. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the accounts presented in court were shaped by specific ends. Unfortunately, in the absence of a substantive amount of legal correspondence between the Ettricks and their legal representatives, we will never know how active William and Catherine were in influencing the way that their case was presented in court. While I refer throughout to, for instance, 'Catherine's allegations' or 'William's response,' this is with an awareness that these documents were the result of consultation – perhaps even collaboration – with legal representatives. Similarly, though I refer to the witness depositions as 'Jane Bootle's deposition,' for example, I recognise that these documents were shaped by the allegations presented to the witnesses, by the notary who recorded them, and by the witness's relationship with the plaintiff and the defendant.⁷¹ As Laura Gowing has written, despite

See also Bailey, 'I dye [sic] by Inches,' 280; Bound, 'Emotion in Early Modern England,' 179, Laura Gowing, 'Language, power and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern London' in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 27-41; Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence,' 3-5.

⁷¹ McEwan, 'Judicial sources,' 112.

declarations of impartiality, witnesses often allied themselves with one party or the other.⁷²

I have chosen to look at the Ettrick case in this chapter as the length of the case and the sheer volume of documentation which survives for it yields a huge amount of information, and clothing is repeatedly mentioned and described by the litigant, defendant, and the witnesses. However, the approach I take could also be usefully applied to other suits for separation. The first section of this chapter explores how Catherine Ettrick's clothing was described in the different narratives presented to the court; I look first at her own allegations, then at her husband's response and counter-allegations, and finally at witness depositions. By doing so, I demonstrate that the same woman's clothing could be described in different ways to support specific claims, using words which the judge was expected to recognise and understand. And, these claims had a very material element. In her allegations, Catherine claimed that William had failed to provide her with necessities and appropriate clothing, while William argued that his wife had been well clothed – perhaps even too well. The second section turns to a discussion of clothing in use, exploring how the movement of clothing and people was used to signal the disorder of the Ettrick household. Catherine's allegations, as well as some of the witness depositions, described how William's cruelty had caused his wife to appear undressed at inappropriate times, and in inappropriate places. In contrast, William's personal answers, as well as his counter-allegations, used descriptions of Catherine's disorderly appearance to suggest that it was she who was responsible for disrupting household order. I argue that in this case clothing was given an active role, as it influenced events, and shaped the narratives presented in court.

⁷² Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 223.

Using Description

Article Sixteen of Catherine's original libel against her husband, which was submitted to the consistory court of Durham in March 1765, made two accusations against him which revolved around her clothing:

That notwithstanding the yearly Income of the said William Ettricks Estate and the Fortune which he Received with the said Catherine Ettrick...whenever she the said Catherine Ettrick asked him for Money either to Buy Cloaths or necessarys with for herself or for Provisions for the Family He always complained he was so Poor that he could not afford it and has only Bought her one Silk Gown at 0£:5s:3d a Yard since the time they were Married.⁷³

Joanne Bailey has categorised this type of allegation as a 'secondary complaint,' which fell within a framework of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour extending beyond marital violence.⁷⁴ Complaints like Catherine's, which claimed that her husband had failed to provide her with 'Cloaths or necessarys,' were intended to reflect a form of marital neglect – especially since William's yearly income rendered him more than capable of doing so, or so the libel alleged. His behaviour, then, was not simply constructed as a failure to provide Catherine with clothing and necessities, but as a refusal to do so. This was also a legal failure on his part. The so-called 'law of necessities' was the recognition in common law that, though married women could not make economic contracts in their own right, as agents of their husbands they were empowered to purchase 'necessaries.'⁷⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, the day-to-day provisioning and management of the household often fell to the wife, and so she needed to be able to buy necessities for it. What constituted a necessary item, however, was directly defined by a husband's status, occupation, and wealth, as a wife could only purchase in her husband's name items which were 'suitable to

⁷³ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁷⁴ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 24-25.

⁷⁵ Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture,' 707.

his rank and fortune.’⁷⁶ Though this law was intended to entrench a wife’s subordination to her husband, Margot Finn has argued that it also protected ‘the interests of wives when their marriages were disrupted by their husband’s misconduct’ and inadvertently endowed them ‘with considerable powers in the realm of consumption.’⁷⁷ Indeed, cases like that of Catherine Ettrick reflect that married women well understood their right to be maintained, and could turn to it as a legal recourse in the face of abusive behaviour.⁷⁸

Catherine’s libel therefore deliberately emphasises a reliance on her husband to provide her with ‘necessaries,’ and throughout the case her accusations turned again and again to this failure on his part. However, the libel submitted on her behalf does not construct clothing simply as a weapon used against her, but employed descriptions of her clothing in support of Catherine’s allegations; it stated that William had only ever bought her one ‘silk’ gown, and included the cost per yard of the fabric used to make it, a description similar to those found in the account books looked at in the previous chapter. Silk was a costly fabric which was also difficult to maintain, and this put it beyond the reach of most ordinary women.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in Catherine’s allegations this single purchase represented an isolated and small investment in her wardrobe in the context of her twelve-year marriage. Moreover, Catherine’s later response to counter-allegations submitted by William in 1767 suggests that her original libel may have deliberately employed a selective description in order to best support her allegations:

This Respondent further saith that she denies she hath bought herself many other Gowns besides the Silk Gown Articulate with his Money save Common Stuff and Linnen Gowns and she denies that he the said William Ettrick hath bought her many very Handsome Gowns of Various Sorts and Great prices tho’ this Respondent admits that besides the Common Stuff and Linnen Gowns before set forth her said Husband brought her from the East Indies three Chince

⁷⁶ Finn, ‘Women, Consumption and Coverture,’ 709-10; Bailey, ‘Favoured or oppressed?’ 358.

⁷⁷ Finn, ‘Women, Consumption and Coverture in England,’ 709-10.

⁷⁸ Bailey, ‘Favoured or oppressed?’ 361.

⁷⁹ Styles, *Threads of Feeling*, 31.

Gowns but that the same turn'd out Rotten and bad this Respondent says that she never had any Gowns or other Cloaths bought her since her Intermarriage of any Value except the Single Silk Gown Articulate.⁸⁰

Though she denied that she had purchased a number of other 'Handsome' gowns at 'Great prices,' her response did admit that she *had* in fact bought other gowns with William's money but emphasised that they were made of 'Common Stuff' and 'Linnen.' They were therefore of a much lower value than the 'Single Silk Gown,' which her response described as the only thing of 'any Value' that her husband had purchased for her over the course of her marriage. As we will see, 'handsome' was the word used in William's counter-allegations, and Catherine's statement was responding directly to this. We have seen that the fabric formed the most expensive part of a garment, and while silk was costly, stuff and linen was not. Though he had apparently also brought her back three chintz gowns from the East Indies, they were described as 'Rotten and bad,' and therefore unusable. This concentration by both parties on describing gowns above any other item of clothing reflects that they were the largest and most expensive garments in a woman's wardrobe, as well as one of the most visible.⁸¹ Moreover, these descriptions were included in Catherine's allegations and response on the basis that they would be recognised and understood by the judge, who would be expected know full well that stuff cost less than silk. Again, this reflects that this was a shared and widely understood language.

The descriptions of clothing employed in Catherine's original libel – as well as her response to William's counter-allegations – were intended to reflect William's failure to provide her with adequate clothing and necessities, but they were also part of a wider project by Catherine's defence to demonstrate her frugality and good economy as a wife. As we saw in the previous chapter, contemporary printed advice manuals emphasised the importance of a prudent wife, and

⁸⁰ BOR, CP.I.1503.

⁸¹ Styles, *Threads of Feeling*, 31.

Articles Seven and Eight in Catherine's original libel attempted to establish that she had fulfilled this role by effectively managing both 'her Family and his Affairs' while William spent four years in the East Indies. As Elizabeth Foyster has argued, women 'had to meet expectations of their gender and class roles before their complaints would meet sympathetic ears,' and so Catherine had to demonstrate that William's cruelty had been wholly without provocation.⁸² Her libel therefore claimed that 'by her carefull Management and Frugality' she saved him a considerable amount of money with which he was 'very well Pleased and acknowledged It much exceeded his Expectations,' something she maintained in her later response to his counter-allegations.⁸³ This claim was also supported by the depositions of several witnesses, including the servant Mary Beadnell who stated that 'while she Lived in the Family she did hear the said Wm. Ettrick in his House at Durham say that she his Wife had saved him more by some Hundreds of pounds during his Absence than he cou'd have Expected.'⁸⁴ The description of her gowns as made of 'Common Stuff' and 'linnen' supported this narrative of frugality by countering claims that Catherine had more clothing 'that was necessary or fitting for any Woman in the County married to a Man of Similar Circumstances.' Rather than costly silk, she claimed that she wore cheap and hardwearing fabrics.⁸⁵ There was a fine line between frugality and neglect, however, as Catherine also claimed that she was entitled to clothing more appropriate to her status than that which she owned. It is important to note here that Catherine's allegations never claimed that she did not have access to sufficient clothing – although witnesses did describe her moving undressed around the house. In the next chapter, we will see a case of marital neglect in which a husband stood accused of depriving his wife of sufficient clothing to sustain life. In contrast, Catherine's allegations revolved around about whether

⁸² Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 83; Foyster, 'Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating,' 224.

⁸³ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1503.

⁸⁴ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁸⁵ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

she had clothing which was appropriate to her husband's status; she claimed that she did not, while he argued that she did.

In her personal answers to William's counter-allegations, Catherine also claimed that 'the very most of the Cloaths this Respondent has were her this the Respondent's Mother's.'⁸⁶ By emphasising that she had inherited the greater part of her wardrobe from her mother, it countered accusations that Catherine had spent her husband's money on purchasing 'Handsome Gowns of Various Sorts and Great prices.' The deposition of Catherine's brother, Thomas Wharton, stated that Catherine had inherited a number of goods in 1758 – including 'one half of the Linnen & one half of the China' – from her late mother Mary Wharton, but unfortunately her will has not survived.⁸⁷ A series of inventories produced after the death of Catherine's father in 1752 do reflect that Mary was actively distributing her household goods, as they list what plate she intended to keep for herself, and what was to be given to members of her family including her two daughters.⁸⁸ Whether she really had left her clothing to Catherine is impossible to determine, but this claim painted a picture of Catherine as a frugal woman whose wardrobe was largely inherited, rather than purchased. Catherine's allegations and personal answers also stressed that she had made a material contribution to the household. Joanne Bailey has argued that, if 'contributing goods, earnings and labour to the household did not endow married women with institutional, formal power, it gave them some sense of entitlement.'⁸⁹ Catherine's original libel claimed that she had brought 'the Sum of Two Thousand Pounds and upwards and a considerable Quantity of Linen Plate and China of Great Value' to her marriage, and witnesses were asked to

⁸⁶ BOR, CP.I.1503.

⁸⁷ BOR, CP.I.1503.

⁸⁸ SCD, Wharton family papers, 1702-1858, WHA. 43-46, Inventory and weights of plate, 1752-1756, WHA 47, Letter from Mary Wharton to her son concerning the distribution of plate, 1756.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 109.

See also Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 50-51.

describe what possessions they had seen in the Ettrick household, and where they had come from.⁹⁰ The servants Thomasine Walker and Isabel King, for example, both claimed that their mistress had told them that she had 'Brought the Greatest part of it with her when she Married Mr. Ettrick.'⁹¹

William's personal answers to Catherine's original libel admitted that he had received a quantity of plate, linen, and china along with Catherine's £2000 marriage portion, and claimed that as they were 'always under his said wives Sole Direction and Management' he could not distinguish them from goods which had been since purchased with his own money.⁹² Clothing was therefore not used in Catherine's suit as simply a source of weakness which her husband was able to exploit, but was also deployed to support a representation of her as a frugal wife who managed the household economy diligently and effectively. Moreover, it may have offered her defence a bargaining tool in extracting a satisfactory financial settlement. By stressing that Catherine was not appropriately clothed for her status, her allegations might also have been intended to pressure the court into reaching a financial settlement, which would provide her with an appropriate level of alimony.⁹³ Both Laura Gowing and Garthine Walker have argued that female litigants (as well as witnesses) were offered an opportunity to rewrite events in their own versions, allowing them to exercise an agency – 'albeit a limited agency' – in how they were represented.⁹⁴ How much influence Catherine Ettrick actually had over this representation of herself is impossible to determine. However, I have shown that descriptions of her clothing were used to support specific claims presented to the court, as well as to endorse a narrative of frugality and good household management.

⁹⁰ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁹¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁹² BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁹³ Lemmings, 'Women's Property, Popular Cultures, and the Consistory Court,' 78.

⁹⁴ Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence,' 19-20; Gowing, 'Language, power and the law,' 40-41.

In contrast, William's defence attempted to use descriptions of Catherine's clothing in order to construct a narrative which represented her consumption as excessive and financially crippling. In his personal answers to her original libel, he conceded that though he had 'only bought her one Silk Gown of the Value Articulate,' he had 'bought her many other gowns her Superiors would think very handsome ones and that she hath bought many other gowns with his Money.'⁹⁵ The word 'Superiors' is significant here, as the level of necessities Catherine was entitled to was defined by her husband's status and income. By claiming that Catherine's gowns were ones which people *above* their rank would think were 'very handsome,' his defence suggested that her expenditure on clothing went above and beyond that which was appropriate. In counter-allegations brought in front of the consistory court of York, William again claimed that he had 'bought her many very handsome Gowns of Various Sorts and Great prices,' and alleged that Catherine 'at the time of her Elopement had a greater stock of Cloaths of all sorts and Wearing Apparel than were necessary or fitting for any Woman in the County married to a Man of similar Circumstances.'⁹⁶ 'Handsome' is not a word we have come across to describe clothing thus far, but it was used repeatedly in documents submitted in support of William. Contrary to Catherine's claims that she had only 'Common Stuff' or 'Linnen' gowns, William's defence therefore described a wardrobe which exceeded that of which was appropriate for a woman of Catherine's station, both in terms of size and expense.

This description of her clothing was intended as part of a wider attempt to discredit Catherine's claims to frugality and economy. William alleged that she frequently took money from him, and that 'by reason of the Expensive manner of Living which she the said Catherine had introduced into his Family and the Expences she was continually baiting him into such as buying Furniture Cloaths

⁹⁵ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

⁹⁶ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, CP.I.1480, Ettrick v. Ettrick, Response of William Ettrick, 1767.

and other things his Circumstances were greatly impaired,' so much so that he had been forced to leave home and travel to the East Indies in an attempt to recover his financial situation.⁹⁷ While Catherine's allegations employed the contemporary ideal of a wife as a frugal household manager, William's personal answers and counter-allegations appealed to another stereotype – that of women as excessive and selfish consumers. He claimed that he had indulged Catherine in her excesses, 'frequently to the Prejudice of his own Circumstances and Fortune,' employing a man and maid servant who waited upon her, purchasing a plot of land in order to build her a house close to her friends, and keeping a four-wheel chaise and a pair of horses solely for her use. However, he claimed that none of this proved satisfactory to her.⁹⁸ While Catherine's suit used descriptions of her clothing to present and support a narrative not only of deprivation but of frugality, William's defence attempted to use her clothing as proof of her excess. This aimed to discredit Catherine's case against him, but might also have reflected a deliberate attempt to downplay William's financial situation in order to reach a smaller financial settlement.

In the narratives presented in court by William and Catherine, we can see that, though they ostensibly described the clothing of the same woman, this was used in different ways. Catherine Richardson has studied the objects involved in church court suits over the breaking of a promise of marriage, and argues that material goods are often the site at which 'deponents' opposing tales meet.⁹⁹ As witnesses saw these things purchased, gifted, and used at various points, she argues, 'their presence is undeniable even if their meaning is to an extent open to interpretation.'¹⁰⁰ In the Ettrick case, the opposing narratives presented by plaintiff and defendant similarly seem to collide over the 'silk gown' described in

⁹⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1480.

⁹⁸ BOR, CP.I.1480.

⁹⁹ Catherine Richardson, "A very fit hat": Personal Objects and Early Modern Affection' in *Everyday Objects*, 289.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, "A very fit hat," 294.

Catherine's original libel. However, these different accounts also reflect that descriptions of the clothing of one woman could be used to support opposing narratives. These descriptions used words which the judge was expected to recognise and understand. What Catherine Ettrick's clothing was really like is impossible to determine from this, as is whether these things actually existed. However, I argue that it is still significant that her clothing was used as a rhetorical tool by both parties in order to lend support to specific claims. This also reflects that marriage had very material expectations, and that clothing could be deployed as evidence for this; it was used in Catherine's allegations to argue that William had failed in his duty to provide her with necessities and clothing appropriate to her status, while William argued that he had more than fulfilled it.

Some witnesses interrogated on behalf of William's defence also described Catherine's wardrobe. Jane Thaine, for example, deposed that 'Mrs. Ettrick hath been very genteelly and well dressed and in as good Cloaths as was suitable to Mr. Ettrick's Circumstances.'¹⁰¹ Mary Wylam similarly stated that 'Mrs. Ettrick always appeared in very good Clothes and extremely well dressed,' while the deposition of Catherine's own daughter claimed that her mother 'had a very good Stock of Cloaths.'¹⁰² The deposition of Elizabeth Cartor suggested that Catherine's wardrobe was not suitable to her status, stating that 'Mrs. Ettrick always appeared in very good Clothes and well dressed and the Deponent thinks rather in a manner above Mr. Ettrick's Circumstances.'¹⁰³ Some of these witnesses also described specific items they had seen Catherine wearing or had discussed with her. Mary Wylam claimed that she remembered Catherine 'showing her a white Sattin Hat and Capuchin which she said Mr. Ettrick had bought of his Sister at York,' and Elizabeth Cartor stated that Catherine had a

¹⁰¹ BOR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, CP.I.1475, Ettrick v. Ettrick, witness depositions, 1767.

¹⁰² BOR, CP.I.1475.

¹⁰³ BOR, CP.I.1475.

‘Silk Gown’ (perhaps the gown mentioned in her original libel?) which her husband had purchased for Catherine, as well as a ‘Chintz Gown’ he had given her.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the ‘Common Stuff,’ ‘Linnen,’ or ‘Rotten and bad’ gowns described in Catherine’s libel and responses, these items of clothing were made of ‘Sattin,’ ‘silk,’ and ‘chintz,’ and witnesses described Catherine’s wardrobe as ‘good,’ ‘genteel,’ and ‘suitable’ – or not – for her station. These descriptions ally more closely with the narrative presented by William’s defence – that, far from being deprived access to appropriate clothing or exercising frugality by relying on inherited or cheap clothing, Catherine was suitably clothed for her circumstances.

Significantly, apart from Mary Wylam, who was the wife of a yeoman, these witnesses all belonged themselves to the gentry and so enjoyed equal status with Catherine. Jane Thaine and Elizabeth Cartor were married to local gentlemen, whilst Catherine Ettrick was her own daughter. This might suggest that, as Catherine’s peers, they were well placed to offer judgement on the suitability of her wardrobe to her station. Indeed, none of the many female servants who appeared as witnesses in the case seem to have described or passed judgement on their mistress’s wardrobe, despite some of their depositions making reference to when and where Catherine got dressed, and where her clothing was kept. Only the deposition of the servant Sarah Beadnell (the elder) mentioned Catherine’s clothing, and it simply stated that Sarah knew ‘nothing of any Gowns bought by Mr. or Mrs. Ettrick.’¹⁰⁵ However, the four depositions which described Catherine’s clothing may also have reflected a deliberate attempt by William to discredit Catherine’s libel. These witnesses were not called upon to make their depositions in the original suit by Catherine in front of the Durham Consistory Court, but in William’s appeal to the York Consistory Court. These women were therefore likely speaking to a new set of

¹⁰⁴ BOR, CP.I.1475.

¹⁰⁵ BOR, CP.I.1475.

interrogatories issued by William. Indeed, the repetition of certain phrases – ‘well dressed’ and ‘very good’ – across depositions suggests that they were guided by the same question.

Disorderly Clothing

Although litigants and defendants in suits for separation largely belonged to the middling classes or gentry, these records also include numerous depositions from members of the labouring classes. In suits for separation servants often played a key role as witnesses to violence, as well as to a number of other behaviours.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in Catherine’s original libel she claimed that her husband would be ‘very Cruel and Ill natured’ to her ‘sometimes before the Servants,’ and over the course of the suit and its appeal a large number of both male and female servants were called upon to give evidence. Some of them had only recently left the service of the Ettrick family, and some had worked for the couple when they were first married.¹⁰⁷ As I have said, none offered any descriptions of their mistress’s clothing despite speaking to a host of other allegations, most likely because they were not asked about it. However, in the depositions of some female servants we do find descriptions of where Catherine was getting dressed, when she appeared undressed, and where her clothing was kept, as well as its movement around the house. Sarah Beadnell (the younger), for example, deposed that while she was in the employ of the Ettricks Catherine ‘Several times’ came into the nursery where Sarah slept, ‘long before her usual time of Rising and with nothing on but her Shift Petticoat,’ as her husband had apparently threatened that ‘if she did not go down Stairs He wou’d throw her down.’¹⁰⁸ When witnesses described Catherine as ‘undressed’ she was probably wearing a linen shift, as in Sarah Beadnell’s account. These accounts are

¹⁰⁶ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 211, 229.

¹⁰⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹⁰⁸ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

relatively unusual and help us reconstruct a more dynamic view of clothing in movement and use, but are not simply serendipitous glimpses which can be divorced from the circumstances in which they were produced. These accounts were shaped by Catherine's allegations, as well as William's response and counter-allegations, and were again used to lend support to specific claims.

In a similar incident to that described by Sarah Beadnell, Jane Bootle claimed that her mistress 'Several times' came into the kitchen 'with her Cloaths she was going to Dress in, in her Hands when the Kitchen was in a Smoak,' telling Jane and the other servants in the room that 'Mr. Ettrick woud not Allow her a Fire in any other Room' and so she was forced to 'put on her Cloaths in the Kitchen He and the Children being then in the Dining Room.'¹⁰⁹ Fay Bound has shown that men's refusal to allow women to light fires or warm themselves 'figured as a collapse of the most basic economic and emotional spousal responsibilities,' and women shivering with cold was an image frequently employed by suits for separation.¹¹⁰ Indeed, this was deliberately played upon in Catherine's original libel as Article Fifteen claimed that William 'Obliged her to Lye several Winters without any Fire in her Room, without any curtains to her Bed and during one whole Winter a Pane in the Window in the said Room was Broken.'¹¹¹ Although William's response to this was to state that this had been entirely by Catherine's own choice, other witness depositions supported Catherine's allegations. The servant Ann Wilde, for example, deposed that while she lived with the Ettrick family William 'wou'd not suffer a Fire to be in her [Catherine's] Room nor any Curtains to her Bed.'¹¹² The maintenance of order in the household whereby 'everyone and everything was in its proper place' was, in the words of Amanda Vickery, given 'a near mythical significance' in eighteenth-century domestic

¹⁰⁹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹¹⁰ Bound, 'Emotion in Early Modern England,' 192-93.

¹¹¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹¹² BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

advice books.’¹¹³ Marital cruelty and breakdown posed a serious threat to this, and, as Garthine Walker has written, was often presented ‘in terms of its disastrous implications for previously orderly households,’ striking at the very heart of social order.¹¹⁴ As well as suggesting that William was denying his wife her right to a basic necessity – warmth – depositions detailing Catherine’s ‘repeated’ need to dress in the kitchen or to move undressed around the house also implied that William’s behaviour was disruptive to household order, as his wife was forced her to appear undressed in inappropriate places and at inappropriate times. Suits for separation therefore grant insight into the emphasis placed on household order, by describing when it was disrupted.

Another incident which appears across Catherine’s libel and in her personal answers to William’s counter-allegations, in William’s personal answers to Catherine’s libel as well as his interrogatories, and in the depositions of several witnesses including Catherine’s daughter, William’s niece, and several servants, again suggests the movement of Catherine – and her clothing – around the household as a result of William’s cruelty. That the incident appeared again and again across these different accounts does seem to be confirmation that all parties referred to the same event, and there is a consistency in the way that it was described. Catherine’s original libel states that on 7 December 1764, William began to beat her in bed and ‘Kicked her out, whereupon she Shrieked out and arose and he ran after and Swore if she made a Noise he would beat her to Death.’¹¹⁵ Here, the shockingly violent nature of this incident was emphasised as it was claimed that he beat her, kicked her, swore at her, and threatened to take her life. However, this violence apparently set in motion a chain of events which would also be used to demonstrate William’s cruelty towards his wife, albeit in a different way. Catherine’s libel claims that after this violent encounter she went

¹¹³ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 298.

¹¹⁴ Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 53; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 209.

¹¹⁵ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

into the maids' room and 'Ordered them to get up and make another Bed for her, to which when Ready she went tho' in a Room and to a Bed which had not been Air'd for some time nor was there a Fire in it.'¹¹⁶ In her deposition, Jane Bootle described a similar chain of events as she claimed that between twelve and one o'clock in the morning she had heard her mistress call out for Thomasine Walker, her fellow servant, and Catherine then 'Open'd the Door Between the two Rooms [and] this Depont. saw her standing at the Door without any Cloaths att all on.' Jane 'heard the Door Clash,' and believed that William had thrust his wife into the maids' room and shut the door, but not before saying 'Damn you Do not stand there making a Noise.' She then claimed that Thomasine Walker made up a bed for Catherine, but in a room 'which had not been Aired nor had a Fire Been in it.'¹¹⁷

Again, Thomasine Walker's version of events is similar. She deposed that she had been woken by Jane Bootle, and heard her mistress call out her name upon which she rose out of bed. She then saw 'Mrs. Ettrick standing at the Door Between the two Bed Chambers standing without any Cloaths' and heard a voice which she believed to be William Ettrick saying 'Damn you Do not stand there making a Noise.' She then went to make another bed for her mistress, but 'Imagin[ed] that the Sheets might prove Damp as there was no fire to Aire them att.'¹¹⁸ Again, William's behaviour apparently caused Catherine to move around the house undressed, and his cruelty meant that she was obliged to lie in a cold room with damp sheets, and again denied access to basic necessities. As we will see in the next chapter, linen was not only to be clean but also well aired, warm, and dry, as damp linen was understood to be harmful. That William had allegedly

¹¹⁶ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹¹⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹¹⁸ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

‘kicked her’ out of bed was also significant, as the conjugal bed was a ‘pervasive symbol of domesticity and union.’¹¹⁹

William, for his part, claimed that at no point during this incident had Catherine genuinely been in fear for her life, and had in fact come to regard the whole thing as a laughing matter by the following day. William’s niece Cicely Weddell and his daughter both deposed that the next morning Catherine had told them that the maids had been ‘frighted’ by her ‘going into their Room undressed’ and had taken her for a ghost, while William alleged that at breakfast Catherine had been ‘laughing very heartily and entertaining her Daughter with the fears which one of the Maids had had of her being a Ghost or Spirit...and the difficulty which she the said Catherine had had to undeceive her.’¹²⁰ William’s response to Catherine’s original libel also argued that she could not have been ‘under any Apprehensions for her Life or Safety,’ as she returned ‘two or three times immediately afterwards to the Bed side where he this Respondent was lying for her Shoes Stockings Petticoats &c while a Bed was getting ready for her.’¹²¹ One of his interrogatories even asked witnesses

did she [Catherine] not return two or three Different times to the Bedside whilst the Ministrant was laying in Bed to gather up and take away her Cloaths whilst another Bed was making ready for her? if no by what means and by whom were her said Cloaths so Conveyed to her out of the Ministrants Room?¹²²

Thomasine Walker replied to this that she had ‘stood at the Bedchamber door whilst her Mistress got her Cloaths & Mr. Ettrick asked his wife wt. she wanted & she said she was come for her Cloaths.’¹²³ Catherine’s personal answers to these allegations denied that she had ‘returned two or three times immediately afterwards...for her Shoes Stockings Petticoats and other parts of her wearing

¹¹⁹ Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England,’ 194.

¹²⁰ BOR, CP.I.1475; BOR, CP.I.1480.

¹²¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹²² BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹²³ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

apparel.¹²⁴ Clothing was therefore given an active role in William's interrogatories, as it was used to establish where his wife was during these events, and how often she returned to his room.

In the meantime, Catherine had apparently been dressed by her servant Thomasine Walker in Thomasine's own clothes. Both Thomasine and Jane Bootle deposed that Thomasine had 'put some of her Cloaths upon her Mistress' after her sudden appearance in their room.¹²⁵ Though this was likely a practical measure providing Catherine with protection from the cold, as well as restoring her to a decent appearance, it is also a gesture which reversed the usual order of things. As the first two chapters of this thesis have shown, servants received purchases and gifts of clothing from their mistresses. Here, however, we have a mistress who needed to be dressed by a servant in their own clothes. This might explain why Catherine returned to retrieve her own clothing, though she denied that she made more than one trip.¹²⁶ Wearing her servant's clothing was a temporary measure, but takes on even more significance when considered in the context of Article Eleven of Catherine's original libel. This claimed that despite the fact that she had come from 'a very Genteel Family and had received a Good Education,' William frequently 'used her as a Servant' by refusing to allow her in the dining room with him, sending her to sit in the kitchen with the servants, and obliging her to 'Runn after his Cows and Horses in the Fields.' Depositions of the servants John Arrowsmith, Mary Beadnell, Thomasine Walker, and Isabel King all suggested that they saw Catherine Ettrick come into the kitchen where the servants were, but most claimed that they did not know whether this had been

¹²⁴ BOR, CP.I.1503.

¹²⁵ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹²⁶ BOR, CP.I.1503.

at William Ettrick's behest or not.¹²⁷ William's response to this was again to claim that Catherine had done all of this voluntarily.¹²⁸

In the above incident, then, Catherine's clothing did not just play an illustrative role in reflecting William's cruelty through its destruction or deprivation, but took on an active role in influencing events, and shaping the descriptions of them presented in court. For example, William's interrogatory asked witnesses to answer whether his wife had returned to retrieve her clothing, thereby shaping their depositions. Catherine's responses to William's counter-allegations claimed that she had not returned to his bedside more than once to retrieve her clothing, as she had been in fear of further violence. In contrast, William's defence alleged that the movement of Catherine's clothing around the house mirrored her own, and that her frequent trips to his bedside in order to collect it threw into doubt her claims to have been in fear for her life. Catherine's original libel, supported by the depositions of several witnesses, also presented a narrative in which William's cruel and irrational behaviour forced her to move around the house undressed, or to be dressed in her own servant's clothing. This was disruptive not only in terms of household order, as various members were forced out of their beds and began to move around in the middle of the night, but in terms of status. Despite her husband repeatedly claiming that she had clothing 'her Superiors would think very handsome,' his abusive behaviour apparently resulted in her being dressed well below her own status on this occasion.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1475.

¹²⁸ For example, William's Interrogatories for the witnesses included the question 'Had the Producent frequently of her own accord and for her own recreation assisted when the Servants and himself have been driving the Cattle...?'

BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1480.

¹²⁹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

The depositions of servants, combined with accounts presented by William and Catherine in various allegations, counter-allegations, and responses, therefore describe the movement of Catherine and her clothing around the house. This threatened household order, which, as we have seen, was understood to be of central importance.¹³⁰ Things and people were not in their proper place, and Catherine's allegations laid the blame squarely at her husband's door. Indeed, the movement of clothing both signalled and mirrored her own movements, so much so that additional positions submitted to the court on Catherine's behalf claimed that 'lest he the said William Ettrick should Suspect and Frustrate her Intentions of getting out of the House [she] durst not Venture to putt up her Cloaths, Linnen and necessary Apparel and therefore left the greatest part thereof' behind.¹³¹ Where she was, her clothing was also. Household order was therefore frequently disrupted in the narrative presented by Catherine in her suit, as William's behaviour caused her to move undressed around the house, to dress herself in the kitchen, to be dressed in her servant's clothing, and to move her clothing around – or leave it behind. William's defence similarly stressed this disruption by describing Catherine's movement back and forth to collect her clothing, but argued that this reflected that his wife had never been in fear for her life.

Indeed, William's defence claimed that Catherine herself had failed to uphold household partly through her excessive expenditure, but also by her disorderly appearance. His personal answers to her original libel claimed that she failed to appear dressed appropriately at appropriate times and stated that, though he had sometimes called her a 'Lazy Bitch,' this was because

she would go day after day sometimes in her Shoes Slipshod at other times in her Slippers with her Stockings ungartered and the Tops treading under her

¹³⁰ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 298; Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 53; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 209.

¹³¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4, CP.I.1503.

Shoes or Slippers and often in a Bed Gown till Dinner time and confesses he may frequently have told her that he hated to see her go in such a Condition.¹³²

Arguing that she had failed to maintain an orderly appearance was intended to cast wider doubt on Catherine's maintenance of household order. Also, this was likely an attempt to establish William's verbal abuse as legitimate. This statement in his personal answers is strikingly similar to advice issued by John Essex in his 1722 publication *The Young Ladies Conduct*. Here, Essex warned ladies that their morning dress 'gives me leave to think the Men have Reason to complain of too much Negligence on your Parts.' He continued:

there is nothing, perhaps, gives a Husband Distate and Chagrine sooner and more effectually, than the disguising your selves with double Clouts, and dirty Mobs; than in shuffling on your Cloaths in a confus'd huddle of Dress, without consulting, that your Study ought to be more directed to the pleasing of your Husband, than once it was that of your Lover.¹³³

This was about remaining attractive to one's husband – or, in the words of Essex, keeping alive 'the Flame of a pure Affection' – but it was also about duty and order.¹³⁴ A disorderly or slatternly appearance suggested a disorderly household. For instance, remaining in her bedgown until dinner time signalled that Catherine did not follow the proper order of things, changing her dress according to the appropriate occasion. William's statement also suggests that, though he claimed that Catherine enjoyed clothing her superiors would think 'handsome,' she did not take good care of it – and, by extension, of herself or the household. Her shoes were 'slipshod' and she allowed her stockings to trail beneath them, demonstrating a carelessness which belied her claims to frugality. Finally, his statement suggests that, though he admitted to calling her a 'Lazy Bitch' as alleged, he was justified in doing so by her appearance and behaviour.

¹³² BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹³³ John Essex, *The Young Ladies Conduct* (London, 1722), 100-101.

¹³⁴ Essex, *The Young Ladies Conduct*, 100-101.

Conclusion

It has not been the intent of this chapter to reposition clothing as the central issue or determinant in the Ettrick case. Indeed, this case shows that, contrary to Stone's claims that only 'life-threatening cruelty' could secure a wife a separation from her husband in this period, both the litigant and a number of witnesses presented a range of behaviours beyond physical violence as evidence of cruelty.¹³⁵ What a close reading of this case has shown, however, is that women's clothing was not just used to illustrate marital cruelty through its destruction or deprivation by husbands. Although, as in other suits for separation from this period, these two narratives did play an important role in Catherine's allegations against her husband. Unfortunately, in the absence of a substantive amount of legal correspondence between the Ettricks and their legal representatives, we will never know how active Catherine was in shaping the narratives presented in court. Nevertheless, her original libel did not just present her clothing in terms of William's failure to provide for her, but deployed descriptions of it in order to lend weight to specific allegations. These descriptions also enabled a representation of her as an effective household manager, and claims that she had inherited the bulk of her clothing from her mother supported this narrative of frugality. This was presented as a necessary frugality, however, as Catherine alleged that her husband had failed to provide her with clothing appropriate to her status. Clothing was therefore used as a tool in her support throughout the case, and acted as evidence of William's failure to fulfil the material expectations of him.

Clothing was not just presented by Catherine as something which was used against her, but allowed her to present herself to the court in a specific way and, perhaps, angle for a more favourable financial settlement. Indeed, both

¹³⁵ Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 192; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 124.

Catherine's claims to frugality and William's allegations of excess were perhaps intended to influence the courts into reaching a favourable financial settlement – a higher one for Catherine, and a lower one for William, who would be obliged to pay it. In contrast to Catherine's libel and subsequent personal answers, William's defence deployed descriptions of Catherine's clothing as proof that she had access to a suitable – and perhaps even excessive – wardrobe befitting her status. Witnesses, who largely belonged to the gentry themselves, similarly described Catherine's clothing as 'good,' 'genteel,' and stated that she was 'well dressed' for her station – perhaps even too well dressed. Although all parties described the same woman's clothing, different descriptive words lent weight to different claims; exploring the opposing narratives presented in court, rather than concentrating on one or conflating several, has allowed me to draw this out in more detail.

The section second of this chapter has offered a more dynamic view of clothing in use, as witnesses described where Catherine got dressed, as well as when and where she appeared undressed. This responds to exhortations in the scholarship on consumption to explore how things were being used, but I argue that these accounts do not simply give us spontaneous glimpses of incidental or authentic detail. Laura Gowing, for example, has argued that in witness depositions we find 'words and phrases that look as if they were remembered, and recorded, in their original detail' nestled between 'formulaic phrases.'¹³⁶ However, these accounts were shaped by the allegations and interrogatories presented to witnesses, which were constructed towards specific ends. Clothing in use was presented by both Catherine and William to indicate household disorder. In Catherine's allegations, as well as several witness depositions, this was caused by William's cruelty as she was forced to appear undressed in inappropriate places and at inappropriate times. In William's response to these allegations, however,

¹³⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 45, 47-48.

See also Joanne McEwan, 'Judicial sources' in *Early Modern Emotions*, 112.

he stressed Catherine's failure to maintain an orderly appearance, claiming that she frequently appeared inappropriately dressed in front of him. This was also intended as a counter to her claim to be a frugal and competent household manager.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated an approach which can grant useful insight into how clothing could be used in the context of a suit for separation. Previous studies have focused on establishing shared cultural and legal understandings across a number of cases, arguing that clothing was a weapon used by husbands against their wives. And, in Catherine Ettrick's suit for separation – as well as those of many other women – it was indeed presented as something that they could be deprived of. However, by offering an in-depth case study of the documents generated by one suit, I have also shown that clothing could play a more nuanced role. It could be used as tool by both husband and wife, for example, and deployed to lend support to specific claims. Moreover, I have argued for a methodological approach to these sources which explores contradictory narratives, and distinguishes between the different documents generated by one suit for separation. Scholars have tended to conflate libels, personal answers, counter-allegations, interrogatories, and witness depositions, but all served a separate purpose. The approach I have taken in this chapter might also be usefully applied to other kinds of litigation; attention has recently turned to the role of clothing and other objects in suits for breach of promise, for example, and scholars have already demonstrated that torn and disordered clothing could provide powerful evidence in rape trials.¹³⁷ And, in the next chapter I apply a similar approach to one trial for murder. I argue that this shows that scholars of consumption should look beyond trials for theft, and begin to add different kinds of court records to their arsenal.

¹³⁷ Richardson, "A very fit hat"; Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects,' 229-63; Walker, 'Sexual Violence and Rape,' 434; Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 59-59; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 106.

There is a final point to be made here concerning emotion. This has been largely absent from the analysis in this chapter, as I have chosen to focus on how descriptions of clothing were being used in the narratives presented in court, as well as the role clothing played in shaping them. However, court records have been identified as one of the most fertile sites for investigating how emotion was understood and performed.¹³⁸ As Meridee Bailey has argued, though ‘evidence of the antecedent emotional experiences eludes us,’ court records offer evidence of the different types of emotions litigants, defendants, and witnesses were able to draw on.¹³⁹ For example, the original libel of Catherine Ettrick deliberately drew on contemporary expectations surrounding the articulation of fear, describing how she ‘Shrieked out’ and ran away from her husband.¹⁴⁰ Though they cannot offer access to authentic emotion, court records therefore offer the potential to explore how emotions surrounding clothing were expected to be expressed and performed. I have already highlighted that the expectations of marriage had a very material element, and Catherine Richardson has shown that material goods could act as tangible evidence for human relationships in the context of litigation.¹⁴¹ Catherine’s ‘Common Stuff’ and ‘Linnen’ gowns stood as evidence of William’s failure to provide for her, and this was also used as evidence of his wider cruelty towards her; by failing to fulfil the material expectations of his role as a husband, William also failed to fulfil the emotional ones. The material and emotional expectations of a relationship were therefore not distinct from one another, but closely linked in contemporary understanding.

¹³⁸ See, for example Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England’; Holloway, ‘Romantic Love in Words and Objects,’ 229-63.

¹³⁹ Meridee L. Bailey, ‘Shaping London Merchant Identities: Emotions, Reputation and Power in the Court of Chancery’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and the Urban Experience*, ed. Debora Simonton (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 328-30.

See also Bound, ‘Emotion in Early Modern England.’

¹⁴⁰ Walker, ‘Sexual Violence and Rape in Europe,’ 434; BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹⁴¹ Richardson, “A very fit hat,” 290.

Even as late as 1767 – when his wife had already been living apart from him for two years – William continued to claim that she was simply being manipulated into pursuing the suit by a brother who held a grudge against him.¹⁴² However, despite his attempt to appeal the verdict in the consistory court of York, Catherine was eventually granted a separation from her husband and the two lived apart for the rest of their lives. Joanne Bailey has written of the difficulties of tracing the lives of many of the couples who came before the church courts after they had separated. Nevertheless, William’s status and his position as a county magistrate – as well as his notoriety – means that we have a number of surviving anecdotes detailing his eccentric behaviour.¹⁴³ After separating from his wife he continued to live an isolated life at the family seat in High Barnes, with only one female and one male servant in his employ. His daughter also came to live with him after she was widowed. As Joanne Bailey has shown, this is not unusual as in the households of many separated men an absent wife was replaced by another female figure – sometimes a relative but often a housekeeper – who took over the daily management of the household.¹⁴⁴ If his daughter is to be believed, in his late sixties he once again became an eligible bachelor upon the death of his wife, with one local young woman even attempting to break into High Barnes through the window in 1806 in order to propose to the then 80-year-old man.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, William never remarried, preferring instead – it seems – to channel his energies into finding a suitable match for his unwilling son.¹⁴⁶ He died at the age of 82 in February 1808, leaving behind a number of eccentric instructions for his funeral, which included a desire

¹⁴² BOR, CP.I.1480.

¹⁴³ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 178-79.

¹⁴⁴ Bailey has also highlighted the potential for relationships between masters and their housekeepers to become ‘intimate,’ veiled by a societal acceptance of the master/housekeeper household.

Bailey, “All he wanted was to kill her that he might marry the Girl,” 61.

¹⁴⁵ DHC, Reverend William Ettrick Archive, 1787-1980, D.1854/1, Diary of William Ettrick, c. 1810, D.1854/3, Account of William Ettrick’s life written by Mrs Sherwood, 1980.

¹⁴⁶ DHC, D.1854/1.

for his body to be carried in a dung cart and for it to be buried at midnight; they were summarily ignored by his son William who, despite having an incredibly difficult relationship with his father, inherited the High Barnes estate on his death.¹⁴⁷

Predictably, Catherine is much harder to trace. We know that she moved away from High Barnes to live at the Wharton family estate of Old Park in Durham – which had been inherited by her brother Thomas – and in his letters one of her nephews made frequent references to the health and wellbeing of a band of ‘Old Parkites.’¹⁴⁸ Many individuals of all statuses and both sexes suffered a ‘socio-economic decline’ after a separation, and it appears that Catherine was no different in experiencing this.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, this decline was more acute for her than it was for William. Their son the Reverend William Ettrick later noted that, upon his receiving two small livings in Dorset in 1787, he was finally able to ‘assist’ his mother with a yearly allowance of £20, she ‘having been parted from my Father before I left him, and reduced to great straits by his Severity.’¹⁵⁰ Catherine died at Old Park in November 1794 at the age of 68, having lived apart from her husband for almost twenty years.

¹⁴⁷ SCD, Pre 1858 Durham Probate Records, DPR/I/1/1808/E5/1-2, Will of William Ettrick esq., 14 September 1802; Summers, *Monwearmouth Shore, Fulwell, Hylton, and Southwick*, 186-96.

¹⁴⁸ SCD, Wharton family papers, 1702-1858, WHA. 224, Letter from Robert Wharton to Thomas Brand, 1783.

¹⁴⁹ Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 191; DHC, D.1854/1, D.1845/3.

¹⁵⁰ DHC, D.1854/1.

Chapter Four:

Linen

Introduction

In this chapter, I take one category of textile as the starting point for my analysis – ‘linen.’ ‘Linen’ (or ‘linens’) has appeared in all of the previous chapters. Women bequeathed linen to friends, family, and servants, and it was advertised as lost, stolen, or found. In their account books, women recorded purchases of linen fabric for themselves, the household, and the family, as well as payments to have it ‘made up’ or washed, and paupers in need were provided with linen fabric and linen items by the parish. Finally, in the previous chapter we saw how Catherine Ettrick brought a ‘great quantity of linen’ to her marriage, and heard allegations that she had been forced to sleep in damp and cold sheets because of her husband’s cruelty.¹ Linen is therefore ubiquitous across the sources examined so far in this thesis, but what did people in the eighteenth-century mean when they referred to this? They were appealing to a popularly understood category of textile which was worn and used by women from across the social hierarchy, as well as the life cycle. In other words, all women needed linen, which did not simply refer to items made of a linen fabric, but rather to a group of clothing which belonged to this specific category. Shifts, aprons, caps, shirts, handkerchiefs, and stockings could belong to linen, for instance, while gowns could not. The linen items owned by rich and poor women alike were largely the same, but varied in both quantity and quality. *The Merchant’s Warehouse laid open: OR, The Plain Dealing Linnen-Draper*, published in 1696, describes over sixty-five different types of linen, some of which we have already encountered. For example, it listed Hollands, scotch cloth, diaper, calicoes, and cambrics alongside the less familiar osnabrucks, hamborough, inderkins, and

¹ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

sleazy; some of these fabrics were expensive, fine, strong, thick, and wore well, while others were cheaper, coarse, thin, did not wear well, and washed badly.²

Looking at linen as a category also demonstrates that there existed mutable boundaries between household textiles and clothing, as it could refer to sheets, bedding, napkins, clouts, bandages, and rags. Moreover, these items might be recycled into shifts, aprons, or handkerchiefs, and vice versa. In his influential study of fashion in *ancien regime* France, Daniel Roche found that there existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a distinction between ‘great’ and ‘small’ linen – or between household linen and underclothing.³ This distinction, he argued, became even more pronounced over the eighteenth century as ‘people were acquiring a wider range of clothing and beginning to demand greater refinement,’ though this had more impact on the wardrobes of the rich.⁴ We do see a similar differentiation in some of the sources looked at in this thesis, as the account books of Dorothy Chambers, for example, record separate payments for washing the ‘House Linen’ and for ‘Personal washing.’⁵ Nevertheless, linen as a wider category continued to be used throughout the century. This is most apparent in the women’s wills looked at in the first chapter, and it is here that we find it being used most often to refer to a collective group of textiles (see Appendix 1). Many women simply bequeathed their linen to female friends, family, and servants. Elizabeth Smith, for example, bequeathed ‘all my Linnens of what kind and wheresoever found’ to her daughter Mary Smith in 1755.⁶ In her 1748 will, the widow Dorothy Wright even felt the need to clearly distinguish between her linen clothing and other linen items; she left her

² J.F., *The Merchant’s Ware-house laid open: OR, The Plain Dealing Linnen-Draper* (London, 1696); Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England*, 144.

³ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and fashion in the ‘ancien regime,’* trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 153.

⁴ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 159.

⁵ MSC, Me A 11, Me A 12.

⁶ BOR, D&C Court, Elizabeth Smith, June 1755.

daughter Elizabeth Farand ‘all my Wearing apparel (both woollen & Linnen),’ and to Anne Wilks ‘Blankets & sheets & all my Linnen (Except such part thereof as is before given to the said Elizabeth Farand).’⁷ Evidently, she was aware that ‘all my Linnen’ could be interpreted to include the items of clothing she had already bequeathed.

This chapter therefore defines linen as a category with an awareness that it could straddle these boundaries between clothing and household textiles. Though both could belong under ‘linen’ this boundary is not entirely artificial, as linen shifts, for example, could also fall under the category of ‘clothing’ or ‘wearing apparel.’ What set linen items of clothing apart from the rest of the wardrobe was the fact that they were regularly laundered. As we saw in the second chapter, gloves, gowns, and hoods – or outerwear – were cleaned only occasionally, and often required specialist attention. Gowns, for instance, could be made of expensive silk fabrics which were extremely difficult to wash. In contrast, linen was laundered regularly, and this required that a woman own at least two sets of the same item so that she could wear one while the other was in the wash.⁸ And, as we will see, not owning a change of linen was a widely recognised indication of crippling poverty. The distinction between linen and the rest of the wardrobe was also one between underclothing and outerwear. Though items like aprons and caps belonged to the linen wash, shifts were worn underneath outerwear and close to the body, which necessitated that they be regularly changed and cleaned. As these linen items were washed more frequently than outerwear, they were also worn out at a much faster pace. For example, as I demonstrate in the second section of this chapter, Overseers of the Poor often supplied women with a new shift or shifts on a regular basis. Linen clothing was washed, patched, darned, and recycled into other things until it could no longer be used. Writing on the diary of Elizabeth Shackleton, Amanda

⁷ BOR, D&C Court, Dorothy Wright, October 1749.

⁸ Tankard, “I think myself honestly decked,” 25; Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 71.

Vickery notes that her 'linens were laboriously maintained and if beyond mending, adapted.'⁹ Even rags served a useful purpose, as they were recycled into paper through a thriving rag trade.¹⁰ Ariane Fennetaux has shown that over the course of the eighteenth century the demand for linen rags rose alongside the development of print culture and increasing levels of literacy, connecting the domestic consumption of textiles to the development of Britain's industry.¹¹ Finally, though both men and women wore linen, the making of it was gendered. By the eighteenth century female mantuamakers were challenging the dominance of tailors in making outerwear, but making linen had always been – and continued to be – women's work.¹²

Scholars have emphasised the increasing popularity of cotton in the period 1770 to 1800, as import controls were removed in 1774 and domestic production rapidly increased; Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, for example, have written that cotton in eighteenth-century Europe 'reshaped tastes, refined a sense of fashionability, and reordered the textile system.'¹³ Following on from this has been an assumption that cotton steadily eclipsed linen as the fabric of choice for underclothing. Barbara Burman and Johnathan White write that

⁹ Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods,' 282.

¹⁰ Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 193; Lemire, 'Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England,' 7; Carolyn Steedman, 'What a Rag Rug Means,' *Journal of Material Culture*, 3:3 (1998): 259-81.

¹¹ Fennetaux, 'Sentimental Economics,' 125.

¹² Lambert, 'Bespoke Versus Ready-Made,' 56-65.

¹³ Parthasarathi and Riello also emphasise that cotton had 'a long non-European pre-history and played a major role on the global stage for centuries before the rise of a European cotton industry.'

Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, 'From India to the World: Cotton and Fashionability' in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 146, 163.

See also various essays in Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi, ed., *The Spinning World: A global history of cotton textiles 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The fabric that made the modern world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

‘cotton’s cheapness’ meant that by the period 1780 to 1820 people were buying ‘underwear garments’ made from ‘a greater range of increasingly durable and well-made cotton textiles.’¹⁴ Similarly, Woodruff Smith has asserted that ‘in the last years of the eighteenth century, cotton moved strongly to replace linens and mixed textiles as the favoured material for shirts and undergarments at almost every income level in Europe and America.’¹⁵ Just how dramatic this replacement might have been, however, has increasingly come under question. Looking at Old Bailey indictments, for instance, Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William Turkel found a slow pattern of change in the proportion of stolen handkerchiefs made out of cotton, rather than a dramatic increase.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it has been John Styles who has most decisively challenged this narrative of replacement. He writes that ‘continuity characterised the use of linens for the shirts and shifts of rich and poor alike,’ as it was only after 1825 that the less hardwearing cottons began to offer a price advantage sufficient enough to cover the cost of more frequent replacement.¹⁷ In the period before 1825, cotton’s biggest impact on clothing was on printed and decorative textiles used for outerwear like gowns.¹⁸ It is not my intention in this chapter to make any further intervention in this debate by charting what underclothing was made from. Though it is certainly possible that some items of linen may have been made from cotton or cotton-mix fabrics – and especially so by the final years of the century – it is also clear that cotton had not entirely eclipsed linen in this context. Moreover, linen was a category which was not determined by fabric alone, but by type of garment, as

¹⁴ Burman and White, ‘Fanny’s Pockets,’ 40.

¹⁵ Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability 1600-1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 61.

¹⁶ Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, ‘Rethinking inventories in the digital age,’ 17-18.

¹⁷ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 95, 130-32.

See also John Styles, ‘What were Cottons for in the Early Industrial Revolution?’ *The Spinning World*, 307-27.

¹⁸ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 95, 130-32; Lemire, “A Good Stock of Cloaths,” 311.

See also Lemire, *Fashion’s Favourite*.

well as how often it was washed. To put it simply, a shift made from cotton could still belong to 'linen.'

A close relationship between linen and ideas of cleanliness has also been emphasised in the literature, and it has been argued that before the eighteenth century clean linen was a mark of status as it 'took time and money to maintain.'¹⁹ However, Daniel Roche has argued that this became increasingly democratised from 1700 onwards, as the white linen of the aristocracy began to be imitated across the social hierarchy. Purchasing linen, he continued, became a way of demonstrating cleanliness through whiteness, as well as a way of showing the power to possess white goods. In Roche's argument, this was all about 'respectability,' which was epitomised in the ability to frequently change linen.²⁰ Others have echoed this focus on respectability, rather than status. Beverly Lemire, for example, has written that 'white shifts, white caps and hoods, white handkerchiefs knotted round the neck became tokens of respectability for the shop assistant as well as the maidservant, for the prosperous blacksmith as well as the middling housewife.'²¹ And, both John Crowley and Woodruff Smith have attributed an increasing association between cleanliness and respectability to the rise of cotton; Crowley argues that 'people could dress in cleaner clothes because cotton could be washed more readily,' while Smith suggests that people could show that they 'deserved esteem on account of their respectability' by wearing cotton versions of undergarments.²²

¹⁹ Anne Laurence, 'Women, Godliness and Personal Appearance in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Women's History Review*, 15:1 (2006): 71, 76; Lisa T Sarasohn, "That Nauseous Venomous Insect": Bedbugs in Early Modern England,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 46:4 (2013): 517.

²⁰ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 169, 336; Burman and White, 'Fanny's Pockets,' 39.

²¹ Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life*, 115.

²² Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort*, 144; Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, 60-62.

The emphasis in all of these studies is on whiteness, and it is white cotton or linen which is understood to exemplify cleanliness and confer respectability; Smith, for example, writes that ‘the fact that one wore and displayed clean white underclothing testified to one’s attention to detail in aspects of dress symbolic of orderliness and moral standing.’²³ This overwhelming concentration on the visual attributes of the textile – on the fact that it could appear brilliantly white to onlookers – suggests that this is where cleanliness is thought to rest. I argue throughout this chapter, however, that the emphasis on ‘whiteness’ in the scholarship is not evident in the source material I discuss. Though we do see contemporary concerns surrounding ‘clean’ linen, this was about linen that was well washed, properly rinsed, dry, well aired, and warm. Moreover, cleanliness did not just concern the visual appearance of a garment; as both John Styles and Susan Vincent have argued, linen was also ‘functionally hygienic and protective.’²⁴ Clean linen was thought to absorb and remove sweat, dirt, and other impurities from the skin, and to protect the wearer’s outer garments from these secretions.²⁵ In the words of Styles, ‘caring for undergarments was therefore a way of caring for the body which those undergarments encased.’²⁶

While the previous chapter offered a case study, I offer a different approach here by bringing together the sources looked at in the first half of the thesis with other kinds of texts. Rather than focusing in-depth on one kind of source, I therefore take the category of linen as the starting point for analysis. Nevertheless, I also demonstrate throughout that paying attention to the specific purposes for which these sources were intended is important. We have seen that the focus in much of the scholarship has shifted onto exploring things in use; following Frank Trentmann’s call to action, for example, Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel have argued that we should be turning our attention to

²³ Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, 137.

²⁴ Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, 78.

²⁵ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 78; Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, 52.

²⁶ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 78.

the 'dynamic processes of production, circulation, reception, use, and re-use.'²⁷ However, I argued in the previous chapter that it is not enough to simply recover things in use – we also need to look at how and why descriptions of these things were being used. My focus in this chapter is therefore not on how people were using linen, but rather on exploring what kinds of rhetorical work this category of textile was doing. In other words, how was linen being employed in different sources, and to what ends? Wills and account books can tell us about the dispersal and provision of linen, and demonstrate that these practices were gendered; women usually bequeathed their clothing to other women, for example, while mothers purchased shirts for adult sons. However, in the first half of this thesis I demonstrated that these sources are limited in what they can tell us about any meanings attached to this. In this chapter, I therefore turn to some new sources in order to explore how we might usefully add to our understanding of linen. Looking primarily at court records, but also drawing on correspondence and three sets of Overseers' Accounts, I argue that the provision, maintenance, and replacement of linen revolved around the material expectations attached to different relationships. The emphasis in these sources is on who was expected to provide linen, and whether this had been fulfilled. This in turn leads to wider insight into contemporary understandings of its role.

The chapter is structured around three themes, although all also run throughout in different ways. They are provision, poverty, and deprivation, and each section considers a new source alongside one I have already looked at. The first and third sections look to trial accounts from the Old Bailey Proceedings, which have already been mined by scholars for details about clothing theft.²⁸ This has especially been the case since 2003, when the Proceedings became available online through a searchable database. Though they are also court records, the Proceedings are different in a number of ways to the sources discussed in the

²⁷ Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age,' 1, 2, 25.

²⁸ For example, Styles draws on the OBP throughout *The Dress of the People*.

previous chapter. In contrast to the written documents submitted to the judge in the Ettrick case, in the Old Bailey defendants and witnesses appeared in person and gave oral testimonies in front of a judge and jury, though it is likely that some of these details were lost or changed in transcription.²⁹ Moreover, the accounts that we have of these trials are publications which were intended for wider consumption. There existed 'a complex system of partial censorship in place' when it came to the publication of these Proceedings, and trial reporting included more or less detail depending on 'popular demand, concern about crime, and the character of that year's Lord Mayor.'³⁰ Here, then, we have accounts which are not simply straightforward reports of everything seen and heard during a trial.

The Proceedings also share some of the interpretive problems with the church court records discussed in chapter three. In particular, we come up against the same questions about mediation. The extraordinary vividness of many of the testimonies recorded in the Proceedings can lead to the temptation to assume that they offer clear insight into the thoughts and feelings of the people of the past. In the previous chapter, I outlined the methodological approach taken by some scholars who have read court records for glimpses of authentic voices.³¹ Joanne McEwan, for example, has written that 'depositions, confessions and accounts of trial proceedings...provide us with rare access to the voices of premodern people, albeit in mediated form.'³² As in the Ettrick case, the testimonies and depositions given in the Old Bailey were shaped by this particular context, and were geared towards a very specific purpose – establishing the guilt or innocence of the defendant. This has been interpreted by scholars like Laura Gowing and McEwan as a limitation, an extra level of

²⁹ McEwan, 'Judicial sources,' 113.

³⁰ Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age,' 7.

³¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 45, 47-48.

See also McEwan, 'Judicial sources,' 112.

³² McEwan, 'Judicial sources,' 113.

mediation which needs to be broken through in order to gain access to the voices of the past. This is not the approach I take here as, as we saw in the Ettrick case, we will always come across contradictory narratives in these sources which make this impossible. Rather, I argue that the way that linen was used in these trials grants wider insight into contemporary understandings of its role. Its appearance was not incidental, but very much intentional as defendants and witnesses deployed it in different ways for specific purposes.

I also draw in the first and second sections of this chapter on the Overseers' Accounts for three parishes in York. Clothing – or money with which to buy it – was often received by pauper women as 'relief-in-kind,' sometimes in addition to a regular pension. It is important to note, however, that not all parishes seem to have distributed relief-in-kind in the form of clothing. The Overseers' Accounts for the parish of St. Martin Coney Street in York, for example, list only the names of recipients along with the amount of money they received.³³ The first set of accounts looked at in this chapter belong to the parish of St. John Delpikes which date from 1754 to 1821, the second are those of St. Mary Bishophill the Elder (later St. Mary Bishophill Senior) dating from 1759 to 1790, and the third are from Holy Trinity Goodramgate, and date from 1794 to 1834.³⁴ Here, we find women's clothing being accounted for by male Overseers of the Poor, which again reflects that an individual woman's wardrobe could appear across accounts authored by someone else. Unlike the Mellish family accounts looked at in chapter two, however, the Overseers' Accounts record a much less reciprocal relationship. This is what John Styles has termed 'involuntary

³³ BOR, Parish Records of York St. Martin Coney Street, 1271-1998, PR/Y/MCS.14, Overseers of the Poor Account Book, 1765-1801.

³⁴ BOR, Parish Records of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, 1573-1876, PR/Y/HTG.18, Overseers of the Poor Account Book for the parish of St. John Delpikes, 1754-1821; Parish Records of York St. Mary Bishophill Senior, PR/Y/MBps.22, Overseers of the Poor Account Book, 1759-1771; Parish Records of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, 1753-1876, PR/Y/HTG.17, Overseers of the Poor Account Book, 1794-1834.

consumption,' which he defines as the provision of clothing to the poor through charity, gifts, and prizes.³⁵

Clothing supplied via the parish authorities was perhaps the ultimate form of 'involuntary consumption,' combining as it did poverty, necessity, and charity. Through the Poor Law Act of 1601, each parish was responsible for the maintenance of any poor who were unable to support themselves. This relief could be dispensed to them in a number of ways. For 'outdoor' relief paupers might be given small sums of cash when in particular need, receive a regular pension, or have goods such as fuel, food, clothing, or medicines purchased for them when they themselves could not afford it. From 1696, some parishes also opened workhouses as 'indoor' relief, where poor people might be housed and fed.³⁶ This system of poor relief remained in place for over two hundred years, reaching a crisis point by the turn of the eighteenth century as its cost seemed to become unsustainable; instead of simply fulfilling its original aim of helping the aged, the sick, and the infirm, parish expenditure was now also being used to feed the unemployed and supplement the inadequate wages of the workforce. This resulted in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which aimed to abolish outdoor relief for the able-bodied and make the workhouse their only option.³⁷ Up until this date, it was the unpaid parish Overseer of the Poor who played a key role. He was responsible for setting the local rates and collecting them from eligible members of the parish, for determining who was in need of assistance, and for distributing this relief to them.³⁸ Though this was largely discretionary, there were reckoned to be recipients worthier of relief than others.³⁹

³⁵ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 247, 255; Styles, 'Involuntary consumers?' 9-21.

See also John Styles, 'Lodging at the Old Bailey: Lodgings and their Furnishings in Eighteenth-Century London' in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 62.

³⁶ Alannah Tomkins, 'Women and Poverty' in *Women's History*, 159.

³⁷ Richmond, "Indiscriminate liberality," 52; Jones, 'Clothing the Poor,' 17.

³⁸ Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 69.

³⁹ For example, see Giles Jacob, *The compleat parish-officer* (London, 1729), 93.

The Overseer of the Poor was also responsible for keeping account of all of this. His accounts were to include all sums of money received (or not) from ratepayers, all stock and ware in the hands of the parish, details of the apprentices put out, and a record of the poor who had been set to work or relieved. They were also to confirm whether the parish had allowed any of their poor to wander and beg elsewhere, whether the Churchwardens and Overseers had met monthly to discuss these matters, and whether the Overseer had assessed all the inhabitants of his parish.⁴⁰ Though the content of the Overseers' Accounts was clearly prescribed, it is difficult to determine consistency both within and across these accounts, as changing Overseers brought with them different accounting and descriptive practices.⁴¹ We usually find accountants changing at least once a year, and often every six months as two Overseers served a term of half a year each. Nevertheless, scholars have still mined these accounts in an attempt to explore the clothing of the very poorest members of society.⁴² This discussion has largely revolved around debates over the standard and amount of clothing paupers received, with scholars falling into the two broad camps of optimists or pessimists.⁴³ In 1979, Anne Buck suggested that, though some entries in the parish accounts show 'occasional generosity,' the

⁴⁰ These accounts were also to include all the burials which had taken place in the parish. Samuel Carter, *Legal provisions for the poor: or, a treatise of the common and statute laws concerning the poor, either as to relief, settlement, or punishment* (London, 1710), 13-14; Anon., *Poor-laws: or, The laws and statutes relating to the settling, maintenance, and employment of the poor* (London, 1724), 50-53.

⁴¹ Anon., *Poor-laws*, 50-53.

⁴² For criticism of this approach, see Stephen P. Walker, 'Accounting and Pauperism' in *Critical Histories of Accounting: Sinister Inscriptions in the Modern Era*, ed. Stephen K. Fleishman, Warwick Funnell, and Stephen P. Walker (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 102. See also Steven King, 'In These You May Trust': Numerical Information, Accounting Practices, and the Poor Law, c. 1790 to 1840' in *Statistics and the public sphere: numbers and the people in modern Britain, c. 1800-2000*, ed. Tom Crook and Glen O'Hara (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 51.

⁴³ Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 160-61.

core aim of the Overseer was to supply basic needs in as cheap a way as possible.⁴⁴ Beverly Lemire was more pessimistic in 1991 when she wrote that 'the worthy poor were never provided with more than the minimum of clothing, so as to discourage sloth and reliance on the parish.'⁴⁵

It was not until Steven King's 2002 article 'Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840,' however, that there was a sustained investigation into the provision of clothing under the poor law. Setting the terms for debate, King optimistically suggested that most paupers 'could expect to see regular replacement of their clothes' and argued that the clothing provided 'did not by and large distinguish them from the wider population of which they were part.'⁴⁶ Peter Jones has broadly agreed with King that paupers were being 'well clothed' but argues that this was a 'compassionate pragmatism' geared towards the practical needs of labouring life, with an emphasis on functional, hard-wearing textiles and a high degree of standardisation.⁴⁷ Occupying a more middling ground, John Styles has argued that assuming the poor enjoyed next to no choice in their clothing is far too pessimistic. Nevertheless, he suggests that the clothing provided by parishes was 'consistently cheap, coarse, and undecorated,' with the clothing of paupers 'barely matching, let alone surpassing, non-pauper adults at the lower point of the family poverty cycle.'⁴⁸ And, most recently, Samantha Williams has suggested that recipients of relief-in-kind had little choice over the type or quality of clothing they received.⁴⁹ It is not my intention in this chapter to make an intervention in this debate as, I suggest, the very fact that the Overseers'

⁴⁴ Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1979), 155.

⁴⁵ Lemire, "A Good Stock of Cloaths," 317.

⁴⁶ King, 'Reclothing the English Poor,' 38, 44, 46-47.

See also King and Payne, 'The Dress of the Poor,' 7.

⁴⁷ Jones, 'Clothing the Poor,' 24, 34.

⁴⁸ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 247, 275.

⁴⁹ Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 42-44.

Accounts were collaborative documents makes it difficult to determine any level of consistency in the kinds of clothing provided to the poor. However, though it does not appear as a named category ('linen'), it is clear pauper women regularly received linen from the parish, and that they were more likely to receive it at certain points in the life cycle; single mothers, lone women, and the elderly were the most frequent recipients of relief.⁵⁰

The first section of this chapter begins by looking at the provision of linen as recorded in the account books of the widowed Dorothy Chambers, and the married Mrs Plumbe. One of the most conspicuous expenditures on linen in these two account books is on providing adult sons with shirts, which has been interpreted by scholars as an inherently emotional practice. I argue that these account books do not offer evidence for this, but what they *do* show us is that motherhood had very material expectations. I then move on to discuss how we might explore these expectations in more detail by looking at the role of childbed linen in 216 trials for infanticide, which were heard in the Old Bailey between 1680 and 1830. Again, this type of trial has remained underexplored in studies of consumption, though some scholars have noted the important role childbed linen could play in this context. I therefore explore in more detail how and why childbed linen was used in trials for infanticide, showing that it could be used as powerful evidence in the defendant's favour. Defendants and witnesses used the gathering of childbed linen to lend rhetorical – and often material – weight to claims that the defendant had not intended to kill their child. This emphasis on childbed linen speaks in turn to wider understandings of its role, as it signalled a woman's material preparedness for motherhood to the wider world. Though these actions became extremely performative in the context of a trial, gathering childbed linen was something which was expected of all mothers-to-be. Finally, I offer a brief discussion of the impact of the life cycle in these trials. Single women were the group most likely to be accused of infanticide, but

⁵⁰ Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 102, 107-10; Tomkins, 'Women and Poverty,' 156-57.

for many of these women gathering childbed linen was something which was deliberately hidden.

The second section of this chapter turns to the provision of linen for single women. I look first at the account book of Sarah Mellish, who was clearly able to provide, maintain, and replace her own linen. However, many single women found themselves unable to do so. In this section I analyse in detail a source which has not been used so far in this thesis – correspondence. I take as a case study the letters of the single Sarah Dawes to members of the Lister family, which span a forty-year period between 1764 and 1804. This began as a fairly mundane correspondence acknowledging the receipt of a biannual annuity, but by the 1790s illness and failing eyesight meant that Dawes was unable to pen these missives herself. In these years, a man named R. Coleman and then a woman named Susannah Franks wrote them for her, but they also addressed letters to the Listers on her behalf (and apparently without her knowledge). I suggest that these letters are best described as ‘begging letters,’ as defined by Donna Andrew. Writing on the correspondence received by Lady Spencer between 1750 and 1814, Andrew argues that the ‘begging letter was the means for the creation of a rhetoric of need’ which, to be successful, needed to ‘establish connections, relationships, and legitimate reasons for appeal.’⁵¹ In these letters, R. Coleman and Susannah Franks begged for assistance from the Lister family, and Sarah’s linens, or lack thereof, figured as evidence of her desperate need. Drawing on the Overseers’ Accounts, I demonstrate that it was not owning a change of linen which was the clearest indication of poverty. The letters from Susannah Franks also emphasised the burden of maintaining Sarah’s linen, as caring for her also meant caring for it. While these letters give some insight into the material struggles of a spinster increasingly unable to care for herself, I argue that they also use linen as a rhetorical tool intended to secure financial and material assistance. As a single woman with no surviving parents,

⁵¹ Andrew, ‘*Noblesse oblige*,’ 275-77, 293.

Dawes was responsible for providing her own linen. When she became unable to do so, this responsibility was shifted on to other people.

In the third section, I take a similar methodological approach to that offered in the previous chapter, offering an in-depth analysis of one trial for murder. In 1732, Corbert Vezey stood accused of killing his wife Mary by making an assault on her, locking her up against her will in a garret room, and depriving her of 'sufficient Meat, Drink, and other Necessaries to sustain life.'⁵² Though these circumstances were exceptional, I draw here on the discussion of marital cruelty in the previous chapter as this trial shares a number of themes with the Ettrick case. Like William Ettrick, Corbert Vezey had allegedly denied his wife access to necessities. However, his status as a journeyman weaver dictated that the level of necessities Mary Vezey was entitled to was much lower than that claimed by Catherine Ettrick. While Catherine's suit accused her husband of failing to provide clothing appropriate to her station, in Vezey's trial the court sought to establish whether his wife had access to the minimum of necessities required to 'sustain life.' Linen was presented as one of these necessities, and in this section I explore how Mary's linen was described during the trial, and used to support opposing claims. By describing missing or dirty linen, a number of witnesses suggested that William had failed to fulfil the material expectations required of him by marriage. However, contradictory statements claimed he had provided Mary with access to 'good' or 'clean' linen.

The three themes of this chapter are intertwined with questions about the life cycle and its impact. Though this has simmered under the surface of discussion throughout this thesis, here I explicitly focus on the impact of the life cycle on the provision, maintenance, and replacement of linen.⁵³ As Laura Gowing has

⁵² OBP, January 1732, Corbert Vezey (t17320114-12).

⁵³ For a more general discussion of clothing and the life cycle see the chapter 'Cradle to Coffin: Life Passages Reflected in Clothing' in Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 140-81.

argued, the stages of the life cycle in the early modern period were the result of 'popular ideas, social pressures, religious convictions and economic conditions.'⁵⁴ The expected stages for most ordinary women were service, marriage, childbirth, and then widowhood, and, though from the mid-seventeenth century onwards increasing numbers were not conforming to this, this model remained pervasive.⁵⁵ These stages were determined culturally, chronologically, and economically – for example, 'old age' might be defined by numerical age, but also by whether someone was still fit to work.⁵⁶ Fertility also mattered enormously to contemporary understandings of the female life cycle. Children did not menstruate, pregnancy marked the transition from single woman to matron, childbirth 'brought a woman into the circle of married women and mothers,' and the menopause signalled the onset of old age.⁵⁷ Sara Read has further argued that female 'transitional bleeding' was significant in signalling the transition between these stages, as women were expected to menstruate, bleed during their first experience of sexual intercourse, bleed after childbirth, and cease to bleed regularly after the menopause.⁵⁸ Linens bore traces of much of this bleeding, though there has been debate over how women used their linen during menstruation. In 1981, Patricia Crawford suggested that women used linen rags to absorb the flow of blood, while Sara Read has more recently demonstrated that women likely bled directly onto their shifts.⁵⁹ As I

⁵⁴ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 4.

⁵⁵ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 206.

⁵⁶ Susannah R. Ottaway, *The decline of life: Old age in eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17-18.

⁵⁷ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 144; Sarah Toulalan, "Age To Great, or To Little, Doeth Let Conception": Bodies, sex and the life cycle, 1500-1750' in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 283.

⁵⁸ Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181-82.

⁵⁹ Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Past & Present*, 91:1 (1981): 49; Sara Read, "Thy righteousness is but a menstrual clout": Sanitary practices and prejudice in early modern England,' *Early Modern Woman: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3 (2008): 3; Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 181.

demonstrate in this chapter, a woman's economic circumstances also played a decisive role in her experience of these stages in the life cycle. While the single Sarah Mellish could comfortably furnish herself with linens, for example, Sarah Dawes became financially and materially reliant on other people. There were certain points in the life cycle where women were more likely to become dependent on others to provide, maintain, and replace their linen. Childhood is the most obvious example, but women who were ill, infirm, old, or experiencing times of extreme poverty were often unable to provide for themselves.

Provision

As we saw in chapter two, account books can reflect the purchase and upkeep of linen, though it rarely appears as a named category ('linen' or 'linens'). These books also hint at the provisioning and care of it. Though small linen items like aprons and caps might be bought ready-made, there are no records of shifts being purchased in this way in the women's account books looked at in chapter two (Table 7). However, some of the Overseers' Accounts do list payments for 'shifts,' and so it is possible that some of these entries referred to ready-made garments. If we turn once again to our widowed accountant, Dorothy Chambers, we can trace some of her expenditure on linen for the year 1799. In this year she made two payments for 'Making two Shifts,' one in February costing 3s and one in July costing 2s 6d. She also purchased twelve yards of canvas costing 2s and one and a half yards of brown Holland at 2s 11d, though we do not know what this was used for. On 24 April she paid 2s to the 'Ironing woman 2 days,' and in November of the same year began accounting for her expenditure on washing

For a more general discussion of menstruation, see Alexandra Lord, "The Great *Arcana* of the Deity": Menstruation and Menstrual Disorders in Eighteenth-Century British Medical Thought,' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 73:1 (1999): 39; Karen Harvey, 'Sexuality and the body' in *Women's history, Britain 1700-1850*, 89-93.

linen, making ten payments between 11 November and 31 December at a total of £4 17s 10d. In these entries, she usually recorded a payment for someone called Betty. On the 18 November she paid 'Washing 7/11 D^o Betty 2/10½, for example, while on 30 December she paid £1 3s 9d for 'Washing two Weeks self & Betty.' Betty was perhaps a senior servant or housekeeper, as Dorothy recorded Betty's spending on the 'House Bill' or 'House Account' in 1800. Dorothy Chambers seems to have made a payment for 'washing' on average once a week in this two-month period, and made two payments for household washing. On 11 December, Dorothy paid 6s 10d for 'washing housh linen,' and 3s 6d on 31st December for 'Washing (House Linen).'⁶⁰

In contrast, Mrs Plumbe rarely recorded payments for washing between 1761 and 1762, though this does not mean that she did not make any. It is possible that linen was laundered at home, or that payments for washing were subsumed under the heading of 'house account.' She did, however, purchase linen fabrics. In 1761, she paid £7s 3s towards 'Mrs Gorsts Bill for Holland & Cambrick' as well as £2 10s 'for a peece of Irish linen,' and in 1762 she paid Mrs Lorrison £14 7d for 'Cloth and Diper.' Though she only made one payment for making up shifts, suggesting that this may also have taken place within the household, she did pay Mrs Gorst 6s 8d 'for Holland for my Shifs sleeves' in September 1761, and 6s 6d in January 1762 'for Holland for sleeves for self.'⁶¹ We can therefore gain some insight into the purchase and maintenance of linen by these women from their account books, but by far the most conspicuous expenditure on linen by these two women was on that purchased for adult sons. In 1762 alone, for example, Mrs Plumbe spent £18 9s 5d on linen for her two sons; in March she purchased cloth for both of them from a Mr Hollingshead at £11 5s 6d, in April she paid 19s 5d 'for making [William] P shirts' and 'for making shifs and a shirt,' and in August she once again bought 'Cloath for WP shirts' costing £4 7s 6d. In May that same

⁶⁰ MSC, Me A 11.

⁶¹ WYAB, Tong/5a/5.

year she also paid £1 7s 'For WP hankershifs' and 'tabel Cloths,' as well as for washing and delivering them to him.⁶² Similarly, in August 1799 Dorothy Chambers paid 'Battelle for Irish Cloth for W.C.C. [William Cecil Chambers]' at 18s 2d, and in that same month paid him again 'for Irish Cloth for W.C.C. Shirts' costing £4 15s 1d. Then, on 17 October she paid £2 5s to 'Hopkinson for making Shirts,' spending a total of £7 18s 3d on shirts for this year.⁶³

Women were often responsible for provisioning members of the household with clothing, but the account books of Dorothy Chambers and Mrs Plumbe make it clear that they assumed a responsibility for the linen of adult sons living outside of it. Linen was made by women, either by professional seamstresses or within the home, and making shirts for husbands, brothers, and sons had long been an accepted duty.⁶⁴ My focus here is on motherhood, though women at different stages in the life cycle also made linen for male relatives. Even when they did not make these shirts themselves, mothers often assumed the mantle by purchasing the fabric and paying for it to be made up, and might even add their own embroidery to the finished item before passing it on to their sons. This was clearly a gendered practice, as, though mothers did purchase clothing for their daughters, this usually stopped once they had left the household. While daughters were expected to learn the skills to supply themselves with linen, sons were not. Indeed, it is likely that their wives were expected to take over this role once these sons were married. Like the bequests of clothing discussed in the chapter one, providing sons with shirts has been interpreted as an inherently emotional act. Amanda Vickery has emphasised that, in contrast to contemporary critiques of women as self-indulgent consumers, the provision of men's shirts charts 'a story of emotional responsibility and consumer service.' This, she continues, had an 'emotional symbolism which carried over even when

⁶² WYAB, Tong/5a/5.

⁶³ MSC, Me A 11.

⁶⁴ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 183; Susan Vincent, 'From the Cradle to the Grave,' 167.

a mistress did not ply the needle with her own fingers.’⁶⁵ Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway have similarly argued that the investment of time associated with women’s sewing ‘was key in imbuing emotional meaning that could be gauged by a relation or friend.’⁶⁶ Whether this emotional meaning rested in the action of providing the linen or in the garment itself is not always made clear in the literature, though we have seen that the recent scholarship on objects and emotion has tended to invest things themselves with emotion.

What the account books of Dorothy Chambers and Mrs Plumbe show us is that providing sons with shirts was a duty undertaken by some married and widowed women. What they cannot tell us about are the emotions attached to this, and I have already cautioned against attempts to read inherent or authentic emotion into these gendered practices. Other sources, however, can shed more light on the contemporary understandings and expectations which surrounded the provision of linen by mothers. Trials for infanticide demonstrate that motherhood had very material expectations, which began before a child had even been born with the gathering of childbed linen. Childbed linen could refer to linen prepared for use during childbirth, linen with which to clean and clothe the baby, and linen for a mother herself, though in trials for infanticide it seems to refer largely to linen prepared for the child. Women gathered these items by calling on friends and family as well as making them up themselves, which shows that this was a performative as well as practical ritual. As Susan Vincent has argued, it ‘signalled the child’s imminent arrival, and helped structure the actual experience of birth.’⁶⁷ For pregnant women, and especially for first-time mothers, the gathering of childbed linens marked a distinct stage in the life cycle and confirmed to the world at large that they were materially prepared to take care of a child. This was so much the case that, as we will see, it became by

⁶⁵ Vickery, ‘His and Hers,’ 29-30.

⁶⁶ Dolan and Holloway, ‘Emotional Textiles,’ 155.

⁶⁷ Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, 56.

necessity a hidden and concealed activity for many unmarried women. Women were advised to begin gathering a stock of childbed linen during pregnancy. In *A Letter to a Lady on The Mode of conducting herself during pregnancy*, Sarah Brown warned readers that six months into their pregnancy they should 'be sure, at this time, to have your child-bed linen well aired, and put into a large tin-box, in a warm place, for fear of a seven-months child, damp linen being particularly hurtful.'⁶⁸ Brown also advised that they would need to prepare 'A half-shift and body-cloth, with strings, a double napkin to your breasts, and a single waistcoat, with sleeves, to come as low as your elbows (made by a skilful taylor as soon as [you] are with child)' to wear during labour.⁶⁹

Childbed linen also played a central role in childbirth itself. In *A general treatise of midwifery*, Pierre Dionis listed a staggering number of linen items required both during and immediately after childbirth: 'several Doubles of warm Linen-Clothes,' 'a Close of old soft Linen, five or six times doubled,' 'several Folds of Linen [for her bed],' 'a Childbed-Smock and an Under-waistcoat,' several 'linen rags,' a 'square Compress of fine soft Linen,' and 'two Pieces of Linen' were all required for various uses.⁷⁰ And, of course, pregnant women needed to prepare linens with which to wash and clothe their child after it had been born; Dionis prescribed several linen rags for washing, a warmed 'Linen-Bed...that is well wash'd and dry'd out,' and several shifts, warning that:

Infants are very subject to Redness and Smarting of the Groins, Buttocks, and Thighs, thro the Sloth of Nurses, who do not shift them so oft as there's occasion for it, or because they wrap them up in Linen that the Lye is not well wash'd out of.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Sarah Brown, *A Letter to a Lady on The Mode of conducting herself during Pregnancy. Also on the Management of the infant* (London, 1777), 7.

⁶⁹ Brown, *A Letter to a Lady*, 8.

⁷⁰ Pierre Dionis, *A general treatise of midwifery. Faithfully translated from the French of Monsieur Dionis* (London, 1719), 176, 185, 258, 259, 260, 262.

⁷¹ Dionis, *A general treatise of midwifery*, 260.

Sarah Brown told expectant mothers that to clothe and swaddle their child they would need a 'belly-band, made of a piece of fine linen cloth...[a] shirt with strings...a blanket, a short loose roller, a little gown, and one cap,' but advised against the use of 'a long stay' for more than three weeks after birth.⁷² These texts were not prescribing 'clean' or 'white' linen; rather, linen needed to be well-aired and kept in a warm place, 'damp linen being particularly hurtful' to babies.⁷³ Dionis warned of the dangers of failing to regularly 'shift' – or change – the linen worn by babies, or of clothing them with linen that had not been well rinsed of potentially irritating lye.⁷⁴ This was not just about projecting an outwardly clean appearance, but was intimately linked in the contemporary imagination with caring for the body itself.

Looking at trials for infanticide brings into sharp focus the importance of gathering childbed linen for eighteenth-century women. The accounts of 216 infanticide trials heard in the Old Bailey between 1680 and 1830 were examined, in order to identify those which mention childbed linen in some way. These accounts are all of those which survive for this period in the Proceedings of the Old Bailey online database. As these trials make clear, the gathering of childbed linen did not always lead to motherhood as the risks of childbirth for both mother and baby were very real; Laura Gowing has argued that focusing entirely on successful and legitimate reproduction 'will erase many of the anxieties, conflicts and dramas that were part of the early modern culture of childbirth.'⁷⁵ Though I focus on the role of childbed linen here, in some trials for infanticide stained and bloody linen was also deployed as evidence by witnesses, especially when it had been hidden or concealed in some way.⁷⁶ Sara Read has argued that

⁷² Brown, *A Letter to a Lady*, 13-14.

⁷³ Brown, *A Letter to a Lady*, 7.

⁷⁴ Dionis, *A general treatise of midwifery*, 260.

⁷⁵ Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, 156 (1997): 90.

⁷⁶ Williams, 'The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth,' 70, 76.

the blood lost after childbirth signalled a woman's transition 'to womanhood in its most full sense,' and stained linen was often interpreted as telling evidence of this.⁷⁷ In the 1801 trial of Elizabeth Harvey, for example, Sarah English described how she had found 'the state of a lying-in woman upon my bed, and all over my room,' later telling the court that 'Every thing was very bad, very bloody, just as if it was dipped into a blood-tub; the bed, blankets, and sheets, all through.'⁷⁸ Access to and familiarity with the linen belonging to members of the same household also allowed women to closely monitor the 'bodily transgressions' of other women.⁷⁹ In the 1769 trial of Sarah Hunter, her employer told the court that she had become suspicious when Hunter asked her for clean bed sheets. She forbade Hunter to wash her soiled ones until she had seen them, and claimed that when she had inspected them 'there was an appearance on the foul sheets, as if she [Hunter] had been brought to bed.'⁸⁰

The role that childbed linen could play in infanticide trials has already been acknowledged by some studies, as they note that it could offer influential evidence in favour of a woman's innocence. This is usually based on anecdotal evidence, rather than a sustained examination of its role in this context.⁸¹ My analysis supports this conclusion, but I expand on it by looking in more detail at how childbed linen was deployed by witnesses and defendants in infanticide trials, as well as why it was used as evidence. Scholars have charted an increasing emphasis on medical opinion in all Old Bailey trials over the course of the eighteenth century, and a number of male doctors and surgeons did act as

⁷⁷ Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 145.

⁷⁸ OBP, October 1801, Elizabeth Harvey (t18011028-8).

⁷⁹ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 65.

⁸⁰ OBP, June 1769, Sarah Hunter (t17690628-27).

⁸¹ Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide,' 99; Vincent, 'From the Cradle to the Grave,' 168; Williams, 'The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth,' 69.

witnesses in trials for infanticide.⁸² Establishing whether a child had been born alive was a central concern, and a number of post-mortem tests were developed in order to determine this; for instance, if the lungs of the deceased child floated in water, this was understood to provide proof that it had been born alive.⁸³ Nevertheless, childbed linen continued to be used as evidence in infanticide trials throughout the century, and sometimes appeared alongside evidence given by male medical practitioners. In the 1719 trial of Mary Gough, for example, a surgeon deposed that he thought Gough's child may have been born alive. However, a 'Box of Linnen brought into Court, in which were Childrens things' contributed towards her acquittal.⁸⁴ Similarly, although in 1771 a surgeon deposed that Elizabeth Parkins's child had 'certainly' been born alive, some 'child bed linen and caps, and such things' were found in her possession, and she too was acquitted.⁸⁵ The presence of childbed linen amongst a prisoner's possessions also appeared as evidence in cases where medical opinion was divided or unsure. In the 1743 trial of Elizabeth Shudrick, a surgeon deposed that the lungs of the dead child 'were so putrified' that placing them in water to see whether they floated 'would not have been a just Trial.' In fact, the surgeon himself presented the court with Shudrick's childbed linen – 'here is the Childbed-Linnen' – and she was found not guilty of murder.⁸⁶ Again, in the 1762 trial of Ann Haywood, another surgeon told the court that although he had 'made the experiment usually made in these cases' and the child's lungs had floated on water, he did not think this 'conclusive' evidence. In this case Haywood, who had apparently gathered some 'baby linnen,' was acquitted.⁸⁷

⁸² Stephen Landsman, 'One Hundred Years of Rectitude: Medical Witnesses at the Old Bailey, 1717-1817,' *Law and History Review*, 16:3 (1998): 464-94; Williams, 'The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth,' 71.

⁸³ Williams, 'The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth,' 71.

⁸⁴ OBP, September 1719, Mary Gough (t17190903-32).

⁸⁵ OBP, April 1771, Elizabeth Parkins (t17710410-35).

⁸⁶ OBP, October 1743, Elizabeth Shudrick (t17431012-20).

⁸⁷ OBP, December 1762, Ann Haywood (t17621208-26).

Of the 216 women accused of infanticide between 1680 and 1830, just under thirty per cent were found to be guilty of murder, while seventy per cent were found not guilty (verdict information is not available for three of the trials). Of these 216 trials, just over a third heard evidence which suggested that the defendant had begun to gather childbed linen. Of the eighty-one women who were said to have begun gathering childbed linen, eighty-six per cent were acquitted of all charges, and ninety-two per cent were found not guilty of murder; after 1800, five women were acquitted of murder, but found guilty of the lesser charge of 'endeavouring to conceal birth.'⁸⁸ Despite a high overall rate of acquittal in trials for infanticide, these numbers support the claim already made in the scholarship that evidence of gathering childbed linen was likely to contribute towards a not guilty verdict. Though witnesses sometimes disputed claims that the defendant had begun to gather childbed linen, there are just four trials which mention childbed linen only by its absence. For example, in the 1691 trial of Elizabeth Deal one witness told the court how the midwife had promised the prisoner that she would 'Lye in private...if she would make provision for the Child, which she promised, but did not.'⁸⁹ Similarly, in a later trial one midwife claimed that the prisoner told her 'I've provided nothing.'⁹⁰

In some trials, the defendant or one or more of the witnesses appears to have volunteered information about childbed linen; in other instances, however, witnesses were pressed by the court to answer whether the defendant had begun to gather childbed linen during their pregnancy. For example, in the 1746 trial of Sarah Hayes, Elizabeth Troughton was asked 'Did there appear any Provision she had made for the Child? Any Childbed Linnen?' Troughton replied

⁸⁸ OBP, July 1804, Ann Smith (t18040704-16); April 1808, Mary Frances Jones (t18080406-35); April 1809 Elizabeth Tomlin (t18090412-33); September 1809, Rebecca Merrin (t18090920-14); May 1830, Sophia Morgan (t18300527).

⁸⁹ OBP, April 1691, Elizabeth Deal (t16910422-22).

⁹⁰ OBP, September 1722, Ann Morris (t17220907-5).

‘No my Lord, but she said she had some a making.’⁹¹ It is possible to identify some of the individual items which defendants and witnesses described as childbed linen, and belly-bands, clouts, caps, nightcaps, shifts, shirts, stays, waistcoats, and cloths all appeared in the sample.⁹² In the 1728 trial of Sarah Dickenson, for example, Thomas Hewlet described how he had found ‘a Belly-band, 2 Stays, 2 Sleeves, and other Child-bed Linnen’ in her box, alongside ‘2 Caps, 2 Forehead-cloths, and a Shift’ that had been discovered elsewhere.⁹³ Though we can see that some of these items appear similar to those prescribed in advice manuals, these trials cannot be used to create an inventory of the different items of childbed linen owned by women in this period, as it is much more common to find these items described collectively as ‘childbed linen,’ ‘children’s clothes or clothing,’ or, especially in earlier trials, as ‘provision.’ Nevertheless, I argue that this is not a limitation, as it demonstrates that this was a widely understood category of textile. People knew what childbed linen was, what items it might contain, and well understood the role it was expected to play in preparing for motherhood. Defendants and witnesses appealed to this wider understanding when they deployed it as evidence.

Many witnesses in these trials reported seeing or finding childbed linen in the defendant’s possession, and these things were very often literally presented to the court; the phrase ‘this was produced in court,’ for example, often follows on from witness depositions. During the 1756 trial of Mary Burket, one Mr Hewit produced ‘some linen that I took out of the box,’ which included ‘a shirt, a cap, a forehead cloth, a long stay, and a roller.’⁹⁴ Similarly, in the 1721 trial of Sarah Hanesley, one witness described how she had ‘found some Linnen cut out, but

⁹¹ OBP, April 1746, Sarah Hayes (t17460409-47).

⁹² OBP, October 1693, Mary Baker (t169310123-32); August 1730, Elizabeth Smith (t17300828-28); December 1733, Mary Doe (t17331205-20); April 1737, Mary Wilson (t17370420-18); October 1761, Frances Whaley (t17611021-23).

⁹³ OBP, January 1728, Sarah Dickenson (t17280117-43).

⁹⁴ OBP, July 1756, Mary Burket (t17560714-24).

not made,' which was also produced in court.⁹⁵ Although 'not made' these pieces of linen suggested Sarah's intention to prepare childbed linen, and in another trial 'Proper Pieces for Shirts and Night-caps' as well as 'five Guineas in Money' found in the prisoner's possession were mobilised as evidence by one witness that she too was in the process of gathering more linen.⁹⁶ Though the accounts do not always record when things were produced in court, some of the witness depositions still suggest that they were; in the 1733 trial of Mary Doe, for example, one witness claimed 'here is a Waistcoat proper for a young Child, which [I] found in a Waistcot Box in her Room.'⁹⁷ As Catherine Richardson has argued, material goods could act in court as tangible evidence for human relationships.⁹⁸ Producing childbed linen in court lent very material weight to claims that the defendant had begun to prepare for motherhood by providing linen for her unborn child.

Claims that the defendant had begun to gather childbed linen were not always supported by material evidence, as some witnesses told the court that the defendant had made arrangements to buy or borrow some, that the linen was being held by friends or family, or, in one instance, that it was in pawn.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that this rhetorical evidence was any less effective than material evidence. Childbed linen could therefore play an important role in infanticide trials, and could be used to provide support in the defendant's favour. Gathering this linen demonstrated to the court that the defendant had begun to fulfil the material expectations of motherhood, which in turn suggested that she had been preparing for the birth of a live child. And, of course, a failure to do so might be counted against her. Although very few trials only mention childbed linen by its absence, witnesses in some trials did

⁹⁵ OBP, August 1721, Sarah Hanesley (t17210830-20).

⁹⁶ OBP, April 1737, Mary Wilson (t17370420-18).

⁹⁷ OBP, December 1733, Mary Doe (t17331205-20).

⁹⁸ Richardson, "A very fit hat," 290.

⁹⁹ OBP, April 1732, Hannah Bradford (t17320419-15).

contradict claims that the defendant had begun to gather linen. The use of childbed linen in these trials appealed to wider understandings of the role it played in preparing for motherhood, as it was a practice all pregnant women were expected to take part in. Gathering childbed linen always had a performative as well as practical element, as it signalled a woman's pregnancy to the world at large; however, it became even more so in this context as linen was produced in court, and defendants and witnesses described the steps the accused had taken in order to gather it. Indeed, as we will see, this performative element became a problem for women who had deliberately hidden or concealed the gathering of childbed linen. Finally, I would argue that witnesses and defendants well understood that the presence of childbed linen could offer important evidence in this context; this is suggested by the 1734 trial of Mercy Horby, who had apparently gathered 'a Shirt, a Blanket, and a Night-Cap, a Biggin, and a long Stay' in preparation for the birth of her child. However, one witness told the court that Horby had not acquired these things herself, 'for indeed I was inform'd they were borrow'd of a Neighbour.'¹⁰⁰ Whether or not this was the case, this deposition suggests that contemporaries knew that childbed linen could be used to support a defendant's claims to innocence.

Single women were far more likely to be accused of infanticide than married or widowed women, largely because they were more likely to have concealed their pregnancy. For many of these women, the gathering of childbed linen therefore became a private activity which was conducted in secret. As Laura Gowing has argued, 'the desire or readiness to be pregnant could be what made the difference between publicly recognized pregnancies and secret ones, between a pregnancy supported by female reproductive rituals or characterized by fear, concealment and confrontation.'¹⁰¹ Servants were the group most regularly charged with the crime of infanticide, and often claimed in court that they had

¹⁰⁰ OBP, April 1734, Mercy Hornby (t17340424-21).

¹⁰¹ Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide,' 114-15.

gathered childbed linen in secret for fear of losing their position.¹⁰² In 1755, for example, Frances Palser told the court:

I had some child-bed linen, which I made in my spare time; and I had sow'd it into my quilted petticoat by my side...The reason I did not let my child-bed linen be seen, was this; I had lived with my mistress a year and a quarter, if I had staid till the 13th of the last month; and I had no money to support me in my illness...and if I had let my case be known before, I should be turn'd away, and not have that quarter's wages.¹⁰³

Palser apparently felt compelled to conceal her childbed linen, taking steps to hide it not only amongst her own clothing, but sewn within it. Unfortunately, for many of these women actions which they had apparently tried so hard to conceal suddenly became critical to establishing their innocence. While they attempted to demonstrate to the court that they had been gathering childbed linen, they also had to explain why no one else had witnessed them doing so. They usually justified this by claiming that they had been in fear of losing their place, but some also highlighted difficulties with finding time to gather childbed linen; Palser told the court that she had made it in her 'spare time,' and Deborah Greening claimed that the childbed linen found in her possession was 'as much as she had time to make in her Service.' Greening produced her childbed linen in front of the court, lending material weight to these claims.¹⁰⁴

The Overseers' Accounts also reflect that illegitimate pregnancy could be financially crippling for a single woman who suddenly found herself having to support both herself and her child, and some were forced to turn to the parish for assistance. In 1763, the pregnant Mary Mawlam of St. Mary Bishophill turned to her parish for help. She was paid £1 5s 4d in relief for fifteen weeks, and the parish also paid 11s towards her lodging. When she came to give birth, her

¹⁰² Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide,' 92.

¹⁰³ OBP, July 1755, Frances Palser (t17550702-21).

¹⁰⁴ OBP, July 1755, Frances Palser (t17550702-21); February 1725, Deborah Greening (t17250224-9).

‘Expences laying in’ amounted to £1 0s 5d, ‘Blankets for her Child’ cost 4s 4d, and the parish paid 12s for a nurse, midwife, and for her churching.¹⁰⁵ In 1764, the Overseer noted a further payment of £2 13s for the ‘Mawlam Child.’¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in 1778 the Overseer for the Poor recorded payments on behalf of Mary Croft, which included 5s expended on ‘Child Linnen,’ 4s ‘When Brot to Bed of a Girl,’ and a payment of 5s to the ‘Doctor for laying her.’¹⁰⁷ Illegitimacy formed a very real threat for parishes, as they would likely find themselves supporting unmarried mothers and their children in the future; indeed, women who had received relief during pregnancy and childbirth were likely to receive it again at some point. Fanny Pearson and her child, for example, regularly received relief from the parish of Holy Trinity Goodramgate between 1796 and 1800, and both had several spells in the poorhouse.¹⁰⁸ All of this shows very clearly the impact that marital status and social position had on women’s experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood.¹⁰⁹ The women most likely to be accused of infanticide had often hidden, denied, or concealed their pregnancies. Single, in service, and financially dependent on employment, they gathered childbed linen in secret rather than announcing their state to the wider world. Nevertheless, this linen could come to play a decisive role when they stood accused of infanticide

The provision of linen was therefore part of the relationship between mother and child, which began in pregnancy and extended into adulthood. As children grew older, this practice became gendered as daughters were expected to take on a provisioning role themselves in the future. In contrast, sons remained reliant – figuratively, if not literally – on mothers, wives, and sisters to provide

¹⁰⁵ BOR, PR/Y/MBps.22.

¹⁰⁶ BOR, PR/Y/MBps.22.

¹⁰⁷ BOR, PR/Y/MBps/22.

¹⁰⁸ BOR, PR/Y/HTG.17.

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 89.

them with linen. However, the evidence for these practices in account books is limited in what it can tell us about wider understandings of the role of linen. In this section, I have looked to trials for infanticide in order to explore how we might usefully add to our understanding of the link between motherhood and the provision of linen. In these trials, discussion often revolved around whether the material expectations of motherhood had been fulfilled by the defendant, and the gathering of childbed linen was used as rhetorical – and often material – evidence that they had begun or intended to do this. In these trials, childbed linen was deployed for a specific purpose, and this in turn suggests something about wider understandings of it; preparing to care for a child had explicitly material expectations, which were fulfilled by providing warm, dry, and well aired linens in a sufficient quantity. This was something which women accused of infanticide were well aware of, as were witnesses, judge, and jury. Indeed, I have demonstrated that the gathering of childbed linen was likely to contribute towards a not guilty verdict. This was therefore a way for these women to perform their preparedness for motherhood, and this can be extended to the continued provisioning of linen for adult children; by providing shirts for sons, mothers expressed, performed, and fulfilled a role expected of them. Where, however, does this leave that argument that this provision of linen was emotional? Though I caution against reading any authentic or inherent emotions into these practices, this is not to argue that they were not about the expression or performance of emotion. As I suggest in the previous chapter, the material and emotional expectations of a relationship could be closely linked in contemporary imagination.

Poverty

As I demonstrated in chapter two, Sarah Mellish dedicated most of her expenditure on clothing to her own wardrobe and, as a single woman with no surviving parents, she was responsible for providing, maintaining, and replacing

her own linen, which her account books suggests she was well able to do. In 1714 alone, for example, she purchased 'A piece of Calico,' '22 yards & half of Irish Linning,' 'Holand at 6s pr yard,' '7 yards of flanin,' '6 yards of Glased [Holland],' and paid Mrs Lister for '26 yards of Diaper,' which came to a total cost of £9 6s 11d. Though she only ever recorded one payment for making linen – and this was 1s given to the 'Children for making my shift sleeves' – in October 1715 she paid £6 12 to 'Cousin John Baker for Holland for my shifts.' She also regularly recorded payments 'for washing' in the back of her account book for the years 1709 to 1717. She never made fewer than fifteen separate payments for this in one year, and often recorded more, which suggests that her linen was washed at least once a month. In 1712, for instance, she recorded seventeen payments 'for washing' at a total of £3 4s 5½d, while in 1715 she made twenty-four payments at a total of £5 16s 7d. This was almost certainly her regular linen wash. As we have already seen, Sarah Mellish usually entered payments made for cleaning outerwear in the main body of her account book – though she did note the occasional payment 'for washing my Gound' in the back. This account of her washing also reflects her movement around different households, for example in 1715, when she made two payments for 'washing at London.'¹¹⁰ Amy Froide has argued that, contrary to scholarly belief, single women were 'best positioned to enjoy a positive old age' as they found their later years to be 'a period of residential, economic and social freedom.'¹¹¹ I will demonstrate in this section, however, that this freedom was restricted to women who were able to afford it.

As a relatively well-off single woman with a regular income, Sarah Mellish was able to provide her own linen. However, one single woman who was not as

¹¹⁰ MSC, Me A 8.

¹¹¹ Amy Froide, 'Old Maids: the lifecycle of single women in early modern England' in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 90-91.

See also Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in early modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

fortunate was Sarah Dawes of Elland, Halifax. In 1764, Sarah Dawes was granted a yearly annuity of £10 under the will of her uncle Jonathan Hall, the sum of which was to be paid to her in twice yearly instalments of five pounds. In a bond dated November that same year, Samuel Lister and Jeremy Lister – the brother-in-law and husband of Hall's niece – took responsibility for this annuity, agreeing to pay Dawes every year in May and November for the remainder of her natural life; thus began a correspondence which would span forty years as Dawes wrote first to Jeremy Lister, and then to his son James, in order to acknowledge the receipt of these payments.¹¹² When she received the first instalment of £5 following her uncle's death in May 1764, Sarah Dawes was in her mid-forties and seemingly had very little close family left. She had lived with her father in Elland until his death in 1763 or 1764, but by 1769 had moved south to live in Waltham Abbey, Essex, boarding with others and at times living on her own until her death aged eighty-six in July 1804. Her letters to Jeremy and James Lister during this period all begin with an acknowledgement of her receipt of the £5: 'yours Received with a bill value Five Pounds wich when paid, will be your Discharg for my half years annuity left me by my unkel Jonathan Hall.'¹¹³ However, in her correspondence Dawes also wished good health to all the Lister family, begged her best respects to friends and acquaintances, made occasional self-deprecating remarks on her status as an 'old maid,' and even dispensed advice on a range of subjects from marriage to the treatment of rheumatism. She also often commented on her own health; in 1781, for example, she wrote 'I am sincerly Glad to hear your self with the rest of your famaly injoy Good health wich is the Greatest Temprel Belssing we can receve. I have been very Endiffrent for som time with a very bad Cough I Bless God I am much better these Five Days past.'¹¹⁴ Coughs, colds, and, eventually, rheumatism and failing eyesight plagued

¹¹² WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/1, Bond for an annuity of £10 for Sarah Dawes, 1764.

¹¹³ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/2, Letter from Sarah Dawes to Jeremy Lister, 1779.

¹¹⁴ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/4, Letter from Sarah Dawes to Jeremy Lister, 1782.

her from the 1780s onwards, which she wrote to Jeremy in 1782 'we must Expect at our time of Life.'¹¹⁵

Scholars have suggested that men and women could enter 'old age' at any point between forty and sixty in the early modern period, although there does seem to be a consensus that the age of fifty was particularly significant.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, definitions of 'old age' remained fluid, and were not determined by numerical age alone. As Susannah Ottaway has argued, age was a category 'created by functional and cultural, as well as chronological criteria.'¹¹⁷ Entering the menopause was understood to trigger the onset of old age for women, and economic circumstance also impacted on this, as a person might become 'old' once they were no longer able to work due to poor physical health.¹¹⁸ In her mid-forties in 1764, Sarah Dawes may have been thought of as 'old' even when she first began receiving her annuity, but by the 1780s she had firmly placed herself in this category, referring to her status as an 'old maid' or 'old woman.' At times her advanced age and ill health apparently prevented a prompt acknowledgement of the receipt of her annuity, as in 1784 when she wrote that the 'Rumatisem in my Right arm' had stopped her from writing sooner.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, in a 1784 letter she declared that 'with the favour of Heaven have pretty good health for my time of Life and as hapy an old woman as prehaps you will find in a good way Concidering my little wich is comenly handed with peveshesness & I have not riches nor ambision.'¹²⁰ She had expressed a similar

¹¹⁵ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/5, Letter from Sarah Dawes to Jeremy Lister, 1782.

¹¹⁶ Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?' 859; Froide, 'Old Maids,' 91; Tomkins, 'Women and Poverty,' 157.

¹¹⁷ Ottaway, *The decline of life*, 17.

¹¹⁸ Froide, 'Old Maids,' 91; Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 102; Tomkins, 'Women and Poverty,' 157.

¹¹⁹ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/8-14, Letters from Sarah Dawes to Jeremy Lister, 1784-88.

¹²⁰ WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/8-14.

sentiment in 1779, when she wrote that God had given her 'wish neither [for] poverty not riches but has Clothed and fed me with such as he saw fittest for me.'¹²¹ Some of her letters did, however, note the hardships attendant on living on such a small income; in 1783 she moved to board on her own, and wrote to Jeremy in 1784 that 'This year I have had many things to bye that I did not want when I borted it is with great Care and frugality that I bring my yearly income to meet with nesery Expences.'¹²² Again, in 1787 she described how 'Every thing is very Dear I could not afford to keep a sarvent I found the Could and [fatigue] of doing for my self almost Lade me up.'¹²³ Living on her own was not only a financial struggle, but one which she claimed was detrimental to her health:

there is not many more hapy old maids but for a want of that sufer much in could weather being forst to Come Down in a Cold house to Lite my fire and due many Cold jobs wich at my time of Life is very hurtfull to my health.¹²⁴

Due to her ill health she was 'obligd to leve [her] lettell House' in 1787 to board with other people, which her 'kind nabours advised me to...as thay thought it much better for me at my time of Life.'¹²⁵

Unfortunately, no letters from Sarah Dawes survive for the years between 1788 – the year of Jeremy Lister's death – and 1798, when she was no longer able to pen these missives herself, but it is clear that her health had declined further in this period. Jeremy's son James took on the responsibility of paying the annuity after his father's death, and it was to him that a man named R. Coleman wrote in January 1798 begging financial assistance for the 'worthy and truly Respectable'

¹²¹ WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/2.

¹²² WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/8.

¹²³ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/264, Letter from Sarah Dawes to Jeremy Lister, 1787.

¹²⁴ WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/8-14.

¹²⁵ WYASH, SH:7/LL/264.

Sarah Dawes.¹²⁶ By 1798, Coleman was writing Dawes's letters for her due to her failing eyesight, but she was still able to initial them. However, Coleman also solicited James Lister's help apparently without her knowledge, writing that through her 'great Age & Infirmities' Sarah Dawes was now obliged to hire a servant to help her. 'The great increase of every Article of Life & particularly hire,' he continued, 'has made her small sum largely inadequate to her Support.' He concluded his letter by asking Lister to 'Contribute & collect any sum from your family & friends...I can say you will help marginally to render the Remainder of her days more Tolerable than they can otherwise be.'¹²⁷ Dawes's small income – which she had boasted handling with 'Care and frugality' in 1784 – was apparently no longer sufficient to support her in her old age.¹²⁸ As I have said, this letter is best described as a 'begging letter,' whereby the correspondent aimed to demonstrate 'a rhetoric of need' in order to secure financial assistance.¹²⁹ Donna Andrew has argued that, in order to be successful, these letters needed to 'establish connections, relationships, and legitimate reasons for appeal.'¹³⁰ In his letter, Coleman emphasised the 'great Age & Infirmities' of Sarah Dawes as well as the 'small sum' she was in receipt of, establishing her as a legitimate – and deserving – object of charity. He also played on the existing connection between Dawes and the Lister family, which was well established by a correspondence which spanned more than thirty years.

James Lister and his family responded positively to R. Coleman's plea for money by collecting a sum of £7 for the sake of Sarah Dawes, which Coleman wrote to thank them for in July 1798:

¹²⁶ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/15, Letter from R. Coleman to James Lister, 1798.

¹²⁷ WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/15.

¹²⁸ WYASH, SH:7/JN/B/64/8-14.

¹²⁹ Andrew, *'Noblesse oblige'*, 275-277, 293.

¹³⁰ Andrew, *'Noblesse oblige'*, 293.

your goodness will continue. On Enquiry I find that the Old Lady is almost Entirely without a change of every necessary Article of Cloathing; a part of your kindness will therefore be very carefully appreciated to Render her comfortable in that Respect...I shall take the liberty when I write for her in May to acknowledge the rect. Of yr remittance of the ½ yrs annuity to give the Particulars of the spending of yr kind gift, that you may have the satisfaction of knowing yr Bounty has been properly applied to the beneficial purpose Intended.¹³¹

This letter reassured the family that their charity had been put to appropriate use, as 'she will now be suppd with necessarys & I hope freed from her incumbrances.'¹³² In the previous chapter, I discussed the definition of 'necessaries' within the context of marriage, as common law entitled women to purchase a level of necessities appropriate to their husband's station. As a femme sole, however, Sarah Dawes was responsible for providing her own. Coleman concluded this letter to James Lister by writing that he hoped that Dawes would now 'be Enabled to pass the Remainder of her Days in more Comfort.'¹³³ True to his word, Coleman sent Lister an account of how the money collected for Sarah Dawes had been spent, writing that she was now 'enabled to have many necessarys she was in Immediate want of & Every Article of [housekeeping] she desire till Lady Day,' adding that she had not purchased these items before for fear that 'the money should not have held out.'¹³⁴ In addition to the £7 gifted by the Listers, Coleman managed to solicit another £10 in charitable donations from other friends and acquaintances of Sarah Dawes, suggesting that James Lister was not the only person to whom he sent a begging letter.

¹³¹ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/301, Letter from R. Coleman to James Lister, 1798.

¹³² WYASH, SH:7/LL/301.

¹³³ WYASH, SH:7/LL/301.

¹³⁴ WYASH, SH:7/LL/302.

Coleman had identified Sarah Dawes's want of a change of 'necessary' items as urgent, and £5 16s 2¼d was spent on remedying this. Coleman listed the items he paid for as follows:

- flannel for two drawers
- 2 waistcoats & 2 petticoats
- 11 yds Lustring
- Irish for 2 aprons & 3 night caps
- Irish for 8 pillow cases
- Irish for 3 shifts
- 1 shawl & 2 muslin handkerchiefs
- 3 pocket hand & 1 Pockets
- tape & thread & dowlas for drawers
- paid for making the above
- 2 pr stockings & 1 pr shoos Galashes
- 8 yd cotton for a gown (and making)
- 1 pr Gloves¹³⁵

As we can see from this list, Coleman purchased at least two of every linen item; Sarah Dawes was provided with two pairs of drawers, two aprons, three night caps, three shifts, and eight pillow cases. It was the fact that she did not have a change of these necessary items which had indicated her extreme financial difficulties. As we have seen, linen was washed regularly and worn out more frequently than outerwear. If Sarah Dawes did not have a change of these necessary articles, this either meant that she was simply unable to wash her linen, or that she had to go without wearing any while it was in the wash. Both were indications of extreme poverty. While Coleman may have deliberately emphasised this material poverty in order to solicit further charity on her behalf, his account also suggests that in her old age Sarah Dawes was becoming unable to provide, maintain, and replace her own linen. The remainder of the £17 raised through private charity from the Listers and others was spent on the payment of debts, two grocer's bills, two linen draper's bills, a bill for coal, a butcher's bill, and a surgeon's bill 'for Medicines.' Coleman also listed that a portion of the money 'Paid for Subsistence from 20 Jan'y to 25 Mar,' which included the

¹³⁵ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/302, Letter from R. Coleman to James Lister, 1798.

purchase of medicine, tea, sugar, meat, bread, and beer for Dawes, as well as her 'womans wages.'¹³⁶

Writing on the languages of self-description early modern people used in court, Alexandra Shepard found that claiming to possess only one set of clothing was a commonly used 'signifier of limited means.'¹³⁷ Pauper letters for appeal often employed a similar image, using rhetorical devices 'such as nakedness and the disabling nature of poor and absent clothing' in order to emphasise poverty.¹³⁸ Owning no change of clothing – or, even worse, owning no 'decent' clothing whatsoever – signalled extreme want, and appealed, in the words of Peter Jones, 'not only to an economic, but also a moral responsibility on the parish' to clothe them properly.¹³⁹ Without sufficient clothing, paupers would be unable to secure employment, thus becoming an even greater burden on the parish. Both Steven King and Peter Jones have argued that paupers were well aware that writing successful letters of appeal rested not only in a demonstration of actual material need, but on strategically employing these rhetorical devices.¹⁴⁰ Tanya Evans has made a similar point about petitions submitted to the Foundling Hospital, writing that all 'drew on a rhetoric of need' using common phrases which suggested that petitioners were 'familiar with the necessity of establishing their legitimate need and good character.'¹⁴¹ Owning no change of linen was therefore a popularly

¹³⁶ WYASH, SH:7/LL/302.

¹³⁷ Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description,' 61.

¹³⁸ Steven King, "I Fear You Will Think Me Too Presumptuous in My Demands but Necessity Has No Law": Clothing in English Pauper Letters, 1800-1834,' *International Review of Social History*, 54:2 (2009): 220.

¹³⁹ Peter D. Jones, "I cannot keep my place without being deascent": Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830,' *Rural History*, 21:1 (2009): 35.

¹⁴⁰ King, "I Fear You Will Think Me Too Presumptuous in My Demands," 225; Jones, "I cannot keep my place without being deascent," 35.

See also Tomkins, 'Women and Poverty,' 168.

¹⁴¹ Tanya Evans, "Unfortunate Objects": London's Unmarried Mothers in the Eighteenth Century,' *Gender & History*, 17:1 (2005): 130.

understood marker of poverty, and one which was deployed by paupers as evidence for this. And, it is not unlikely that this was a rhetorical tool also deployed by paupers in everyday interactions with the Overseers of the Poor.

Looking at the Overseer's Accounts, we can also see that linen was regularly being accounted for by different Overseers across the three parishes. Though these accounts rarely list 'linen' or 'linens,' they *do* record payments for purchasing linen fabric and for having it made up. In 1780, for example, the Overseer of St. John Delpikes recorded that he had 'Bought Mary Crowder one sheet one shift a flannel petty coat a pillow stop and hankercheif all new and making,' costing 11s 9½d. It was shifts, however, which were the linen items distributed to women most often. In the Overseers' Accounts for the parish of St. John Delpikes, for example, are listed the following payments: 'for a Shift' for Mary Todd in 1769, for '1 Petticoat & 2 Shifts' for Mary Relph in 1771, for 'stockings new Shift 2 Aprons' for Mary Crowther in 1781, and 'Elizabeth Cunningham a Shift' and 'a Shift for Mary Settle' in 1782. In 1801, as well as paying 5s to 'get her Cloaths out of Pawn,' the Overseer also recorded a payment of 7s to Elizabeth Young 'for 2 Shifts.'¹⁴² Similarly, in the parish of St. Mary Bishophill the Elder, '2 Shifts & a pair of Shoues' were purchased for Ann Clark in 1762, '2 Petticoats & 2 Shifts' for Mary Bainbridge in 1774, '5 yds Cloth for Eliz: Wilson 2 Shifts' in 1781, and 'To 2 Shifts for Chapmans Daughter in Law' in 1785.¹⁴³

There are two important points to be made about the provision of shifts by the parish. The first is that we often find the same women receiving them in different years; in the parish of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, for example, Elizabeth Mason received '2 new Shifts' in 1800, two more in 1801, and 'Shifts' in 1804.'¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² BOR, PR/Y/HTG.18.

¹⁴³ BOR, PR/Y/MBps.22.

¹⁴⁴ BOR, PR/Y/HTG.17.

In the parish of St. John Delpikes, Sarah Wright received 'a Petticoat and two new Shifts' in 1773, '3 yards of Shift Cloth' in 1775, and one shift in 1777.¹⁴⁵ And, Dorothy Fallowfield of St. Mary Bishophill the Elder received at least one new shift almost every year between 1759 and 1770.¹⁴⁶ The fact that linen was washed frequently, and therefore worn out more quickly than outerwear, explains this semi-regular replacement. Providing poor women with linen was not an occasional expense, but rather placed a more regular burden on the parish. This gives pause to arguments that this relief-in-kind was the most 'intimate' or 'sensitive' aspect of the poor law, as it shows that this kind of relief was dispensed fairly regularly, and by a number of different Overseers.¹⁴⁷ The second point is that, as we can see from the above examples, individual women were frequently provided with two shifts at a time. Looking at the three sets of Overseers' Accounts, one shift seems to have cost on average around 2s 6d to 3s, so parishes were regularly making payments of 5s to 6s at a time for two. Owning one change of linen was understood to be the bare minimum, and anything which fell below this was indicative of extreme want. In order to alleviate poverty, the parish was therefore often obliged to provide women with a change. Though some women did only receive one shift at a time, many could therefore expect to receive two. The women receiving parish relief were overwhelmingly single or widowed, and many experienced poverty as a result of old age or illness.¹⁴⁸ Like Sarah Dawes, these women may no longer have been able to provide themselves with linen necessities. But, while Dawes was able to turn to private charity, these women became materially reliant on the parish.

In 1798, Sarah Dawes moved in to board with Susannah and Edward Franks, who would care for her until her death in 1804. Susannah took over from Coleman and began writing Dawes's letters of receipt to James Lister, documenting a

¹⁴⁵ BOR, PR/Y/HTG.18.

¹⁴⁶ BOR, PR/Y/MBps.22.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, 'Clothing the Poor,' 18; Hindle, *On the Parish?* 271.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 12.

further decline in her health. According to Franks's letters, by 1803 two people were needed to move Dawes in and out of bed, while her eyesight had deteriorated so much that she was no longer able to lend her initials to these letters.¹⁴⁹ By November 1803, Franks had also begun writing begging letters to Lister petitioning him for financial assistance. In one of these letters, Franks described what a 'heavy hand' she had with caring for Dawes – 'she wants so much waiting on and her income is so small that I must petition of your goodness & Generosity.'¹⁵⁰ In their begging letters, both R. Coleman and Susannah Franks appealed to the 'goodness' or 'generosity' of James Lister and his family, deliberately appealing to a sense of charitable duty. This language also grants some insight into the emotions the Lister family were expected to feel towards Dawes, as these letters spoke to their 'generosity.' By May in 1804, however, Susannah Franks's letters had become more frantic as she frequently exclaimed 'what I must Do with her I cant tell.' Although she acknowledged that 'it is not a subject fit to write to you about Sir,' she apparently felt obliged to describe how 'Mrs Dawes is so very infirm that she spoils every thing on the Bed.'¹⁵¹ A gift of money from Lister the previous winter had enabled her to buy Dawes 'some Linen,' however Franks wrote

I have a Large family and Can not aford to have all my things spoiled...to do these duty by her the washing and one thing or a nother takes away so much of her money I cant make ends meet at all.¹⁵²

That she mentioned washing here is significant. Taking care of Sarah Dawes also meant providing and maintaining her linen – washing it, drying it, and airing it – which appears to have become an increasingly difficult task as Dawes could no longer control her bodily excretions. It was also a costly undertaking, which

¹⁴⁹ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/327, Letter from Susannah Franks to James Lister, 1802.

¹⁵⁰ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/330, Letter from Susannah Franks to James Lister, 1803.

¹⁵¹ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/336, Letter from Susannah Franks to James Lister, 1804.

¹⁵² WYASH, SH:7/LL/336.

Franks claimed Dawes's annuity could no longer cover. Though R. Coleman's letters clearly established Sarah Dawes as the worthy object of charity, in Franks's letters this is more ambiguous as she also presents herself and her family as in need.

There is an air of desperation to the letters from Susannah Franks, but they were also geared towards a specific purpose; she was asking Lister for financial assistance in order to supplement Sarah Dawes's 'small income,' which Franks claimed did not cover the costs of caring for her. Indeed, the fact that she referred to linen purchased with money Lister had already provided suggests that her begging letters had previously enjoyed some success. In these letters, Franks emphasised the responsibility placed on her, employing the burden of frequently washing linen as evidence of her difficult financial position. By sharing the fact that Dawes frequently soiled her linen, she also drew Lister's attention to Dawes's increasing infirmity and dependence. Finally, she spoke of her 'duty' towards Dawes, which made it hard for her to 'make ends meet.' As she also had her own 'Large family' to care for, this was potentially disastrous. Though we cannot know for certain, as a married woman Susannah Franks was likely responsible for providing linen for other household dependents. By July 1804, Franks wrote to Lister that Dawes had been 'taken totally helpless' and was no longer able to feed herself without assistance.¹⁵³ Sarah Dawes died that same month, leaving everything to Franks's husband Edward in her will although, as Susannah later wrote to Lister, 'the whole Content don't amount to near 10 pounds.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/LL/337, Letter from Susannah Franks to James Lister, 1804.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11/1430/336, Will of Sarah Dawes, Spinster of Waltham Holy Cross, Essex, 24 September 1805; WYASH, Lister Family of Shibden Hall, Family and Estate Records, 13th century-1933, SH:7/JN/B/64/17, Letter from Susannah Franks to James Lister, 1804.

Though the single Sarah Mellish was clearly able to provide, maintain, and replace her own linen from 1708 until her death aged 46 in 1718, Sarah Dawes was not. This shows how economic circumstance impacted on women's experiences of the life cycle, as Dawes ultimately became reliant on private charity in her old age, while other women turned to the parish for support. It was owning no change of linen which was most indicative of poverty, and the fact that at least two sets of linen necessities were purchased for Dawes in 1798, as well the regular provision of shifts to female paupers by the parish, suggests that these were very real material circumstances for a number of women. The life cycle had a decisive impact on this; in the case of Sarah Dawes, for instance, illness, old age, and its attendant poverty meant that she became increasingly reliant on others to provide linen for her. It is not difficult to draw parallels here between her dependence and that of a child on its mother, and, indeed, Susannah Franks referred to this as her 'duty.' Nevertheless, owning no change of linen necessities was also a popularly understood marker of poverty, which could be deployed as a rhetorical device in pleas for financial – and material – assistance. Finally, the correspondence of Sarah Dawes speaks to the responsibilities of providing linen. As a single woman, Dawes was responsible for providing, maintaining, and replacing her own linen; however, when she was no longer able to do so, this became the responsibility of someone else.

Deprivation

The final section of this chapter turns to a detailed discussion of the trial of Corbert Vezey, described by witnesses as a 'journeyman weaver,' which was heard in the Old Bailey in January 1732. Vezey stood accused of killing his wife Mary by making an assault on her, locking her up against her will in a garret room, and depriving her of 'sufficient Meat, Drink, and other Necessaries to

sustain life.’¹⁵⁵ Vezey had allegedly kept his wife in this condition until 16 December 1731, when, apparently tired of his ill treatment, she had thrown herself out of the garret window in an attempt to end her life. She died fourteen days later on 30 December. This trial has already been analysed in the context of marital violence and wife murder, with Joanne Bailey arguing that – though Vezey departed from more ‘mundane’ forms of abuse by ‘confining and systematically starving his wife to death’ – it mirrors the complaints of other wives that their husbands had denied them access to necessities.¹⁵⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, withholding ‘basic necessities’ like food, clothing, shelter, and medical care often figured as complaints in suits for separation brought in front of the church courts; for example, Catherine Ettrick’s libel deliberately emphasised her reliance on her husband to provide ‘necessaries,’ as well as his failure to do so.¹⁵⁷

By virtue of her status and wealth, Catherine Ettrick was able to legally separate from her husband, though this was a lengthy and difficult process. Women without access to the same resources, however, enjoyed far fewer options when they found themselves trapped in violent or cruel marriages. Corbert Vezey’s trial demonstrates the exceptional point at which marital cruelty allegedly resulted in murder, but Mary Vezey’s experiences also speak to those of a number of women likely trapped in similar situations. Moreover, acts of cruelty were defined according to the social status of the couple; a higher ranking – and therefore ‘more sensitive’ – wife was understood to be endangered by less violent abuse than a labouring woman.¹⁵⁸ A husband’s economic position also directly determined the level of provision his wife was entitled to under the law of necessities. As we will see, the necessities Mary Vezey was understood to be

¹⁵⁵ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁵⁶ Bailey, “I dye [sic] by Inches,” 280.

See also Hurl-Eamon, “I Will Forgive You if the World Will,” 226.

¹⁵⁷ Bailey and Giese, ‘Marital cruelty,’ 295.

¹⁵⁸ Bailey and Giese, ‘Marital cruelty,’ 290.

entitled to differed enormously from those Catherine Ettrick claimed to have been denied.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Vezey's trial revolved around establishing whether or not he had provided his wife with the minimum level of necessities 'to sustain life.'¹⁶⁰ In this section I focus on linen in this context, taking a similar in-depth approach to that used in the previous chapter in order to explore how it was deployed as evidence throughout this trial. Again, this is not an attempt to reposition clothing as the crux of the case. However, linen was presented as one of a number of necessities which Vezey had failed to provide for his wife.

A number of witnesses in the trial of Corbert Vezey deliberately appealed to the law of necessities, claiming that before her death Mary had disclosed that she had been denied this right. As her husband, Vezey was supposed to allow his wife the power to purchase 'necessaries' on his account; however, as Mary was apparently confined to her room, she was unable to purchase these things herself. She therefore became doubly reliant on her husband to provide her with necessities, which a number of witnesses alleged he had failed to do. Sarah Brees claimed that Mary had told her that 'she was starv'd for want of Necessaries,' while James Badily stated that Mary said 'she had netiher Fire nor Candle, nor the common Necessaries of Life to subsist.' Again, Anne Badily claimed that Mary had cried 'I have been lock'd up in the Room for a Year and a half, perishing with Hunger and Cold, and in want of the common Necessaries of life.'¹⁶¹ The 'necessaries' in these statements were food, warmth, and light, and Mary's own Examination – taken before her death on 17 December 1731 – alleged that her husband had confined her

and kept her during that time chiefly with cold Meat, and sometimes with dry and mouldy Bread, and cold Small beer...which she was obliged to creep on her Hands and Knees to fetch, and had neither Candle nor Fire all the time.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture,' 709-10; Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 358.

¹⁶⁰ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁶¹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁶² OBP, Corbert Vezey.

Another necessary which Mary was allegedly deprived of was linen, both clothing and household. The beadle Christopher Best described how he had found Mary after her fall from the window:

She had on a thin old Crape-Gown, and a Bit of a red Petticoat, but no Shift nor Stockings. By-and-by a Woman came out of the Four Swans, took her under her Arm (for she was light enough) and carried her in...She was carry'd up Stairs, I would have followed directly, but they refused to let me, for they said they must put her on a clean Shift.¹⁶³

Some time after this, Best continued, he followed a group of women up into the garret where he found Mary wearing a shift. His deposition emphasised that she had not been sufficiently clothed to receive him before this. She wore no linen, and even her few pieces of outerwear were 'thin,' 'old,' and incomplete. Indeed, according to Best he was not allowed to see her until she had been dressed in a 'clean Shift.'¹⁶⁴ As we have seen in the pauper letters for appeal, appearing 'decent' required a minimum level of clothing and, even though Mary was dressed in some outerwear, without a shift she was not sufficiently dressed.¹⁶⁵ Witnesses also cited missing sheets as evidence of Mary's material deprivation. Mary had apparently told Christopher Best that her husband and the woman he lived with 'would not so much as let me have a little Fire, or a bit of a Candle, or Sheets to my Bed, tho' they knew I was ready to perish with Cold.' Anne Badily also stated that Mary told her she was kept without 'Covering that would keep me Warm' and never 'had Sheet or a Blanket,' while Mary's brother claimed that 'She had not Sheets on her Bed.'¹⁶⁶

We saw in the previous chapter how Catherine Ettrick similarly claimed that her husband's cruelty had forced her to sleep in sheets which were cold, damp, and

¹⁶³ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁶⁴ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁶⁵ Jones, "I cannot keep my place without being deascent," 31-32; King, "I Fear You Will Think Me Too Presumptuous," 212, 220.

¹⁶⁶ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

unaided.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, while Catherine Ettrick claimed she was not furnished with necessities appropriate to her status, this was largely figured as a right to be maintained with more clothing than the 'Common Stuff' and 'Linnen' gowns in her possession.¹⁶⁸ This stands in contrast to the acute material deprivation which witnesses alleged Mary Vezey faced. As the wife of a member of the labouring classes, the bare minimum of necessities Mary was entitled to was much lower than that claimed by Catherine Ettrick. Moreover, without sufficient linen Mary's health was understood to be very much at risk. Not only was she exposed to the cold, but witnesses also claimed that she was unable to keep herself clean due to lack of necessities. James Badily claimed that Mary had told him that her garret room 'was in such a Condition with her own Nastiness (for she had not Necessaries to case herself, and to keep clean,) that the scent of it was very noisome to her.'¹⁶⁹ Here, it was the fact that she had no necessities 'with which to case herself' which meant that she was unable to keep clean, again reflecting the role linen was thought to play in absorbing and drawing impurities away from the body, as well as protecting it from the outside world. A clean shift also meant a clean and healthy body. This also had implications in terms of smell; Anne Badily similarly told the court that the scent of Mary's room 'was so offensive that I could hardly bear it. She offer'd to kiss me, but she was in such a sad Condition, and smelt so strong, that I was obliged to decline it.' Anne also told the court that Mary had said 'I am almost devour'd with Vermin, they have eat Holes in my Head,' and Mary's brother similarly claimed that she was 'full of vermin.'¹⁷⁰ Without shift or sheets to cover her or keep her clean, Mary's already frail body was susceptible to attacks by verminous intruders. Depriving his wife of linen did not just mean that Corbert Vezey had failed to allow her to sufficiently clothe herself, but was presented by witnesses as a central cause of her failing health.

¹⁶⁷ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹⁶⁸ BOR, TRANS.CP.1765/4.

¹⁶⁹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁷⁰ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

Other witnesses, however, claimed that Mary had been sufficiently, and even well-provided with linen necessities by her husband. In contrast to the state of almost total undress described by Christopher Best, Edward Hawtrey told the court that he had been to visit Mary on 21 December, and ‘the Room was not noisome; she had on a black and white Crape-Gown, and Shift and a Cap.’ Hawtrey’s visit took place after Mary fell from her garret window, but Sarah Skelton claimed that she had often dined in the house with Corbert Vezey and others before this; she claimed that, as well as seeing ‘hot Victuals and warm Ale’ carried up several times to her, on one occasion Mary ‘had on a clean Shift and Mob, and very clean Sheets.’ Similarly, Elizabeth Hawtrey told the court that Mary had ‘tolerable good Shifts,’ and that she herself had ‘washed her and shifted her.’¹⁷¹ These depositions contradicted claims that Mary had been deprived of linen, and Hawtrey even suggested that she had changed Mary’s shift herself. Linen was therefore deployed as rhetorical evidence in this trial to support opposing claims, but it is possible that some of Mary’s linen was also presented to the court as evidence. The washerwoman Anne Crew deposed that:

This is one of her Aprons - and this one of her Handkerchiefs - The Deceas'd gave them me for laying her out. She had 18 Handkerchiefs, 2 colour'd Aprons, and 1 Muslin Apron; they were in a Trunk in her Garret, and I did not see that the Trunk was lock'd.¹⁷²

As well as listing a number of items she claimed Mary had access to, the fact that Crew was recorded as saying ‘This is one of her Aprons’ and ‘this one of her Handkerchiefs’ suggests that she may have produced them in court, or might even have been wearing them herself. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, presenting items of linen in court could lend tangible material evidence to certain claims. And, even when witnesses did not literally present Mary’s linen to the court, their descriptions of it functioned in a similar way.

¹⁷¹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁷² OBP, Corbert Vezey.

As a number of witnesses claimed that Mary had been unable to keep herself clean, the court sought to establish whether this had in fact been the case.

Elizabeth Finlow, who kept the house in which Vezey and his wife lodged, was asked how much linen Mary had, and how often it had been washed:

Court: What Bedding had she? Elizabeth Finlow: A good Feather Bed, 3 good Blankets, a Green Coverlet, and Callicoe Sheets; She had 2 Pair of Sheets. Court: How often were they wash'd? E.F.: As often as we wash'd, once a Month.¹⁷³

Finlow also claimed that Mary had never asked for a fire to be set in her room, implying that this deprivation was by Mary's own choice. The washerwoman Ann Crew was also asked a number of similar questions, and she claimed that Mary had '1 Sheet, 3 Blankets, and a Counterpain; they were good tidy Blankets, fit for a poor Body's Bed.' When asked how often she washed these sheets, Crew replied 'I cannot say how often; but I have washed Sheets.' Mary's shifts were washed, Crew claimed, 'As often as she soul'd them.' When pressed by the court to be more exact in her answers, Crew replied 'Why, my Lord, she would not always soul them,' but finally admitted that she had only ever washed two shifts. Similarly, she told the court that Mary had '9 Caps,' but that she again only washed them 'As often as she sould' them; but she would not soul them.'¹⁷⁴

As we have seen, linen was supposed to be laundered regularly, and so the evidence heard in court did not just discuss how much linen Mary had been provided with, but also whether it was taken care of. Crew's claim that Mary would not always soil her shifts and caps is an interesting one, as she later told the court that Mary said 'she would not wear them out, because she was willing to keep them to go into the Hospital; and so she cut the Sheets, and pinned the Pieces about her instead of a Shift.'¹⁷⁵ The image of Mary clothed in her sheets is an ambiguous one; on the one hand, it was likely intended to signal to the court

¹⁷³ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁷⁴ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁷⁵ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

that it was Mary's own choice not to wear a shift. Indeed, Elizabeth Hawtrey similarly described how she had found Mary without a shift: 'says I, why do you go so? Because, says she, I can't bear a Shift.'¹⁷⁶ However, Jonathon Andrews has argued that the 'mad poor' were 'typically represented and often witnessed as dressed in blankets or even swaddling clothes,' their inability to clothe themselves reflecting their 'child-like dependency' on others.¹⁷⁷ Being clothed in her sheets may similarly have suggested Mary's dependency and inability to provide for herself. Crew's statement also suggests that Mary was not given access to replacement linen. Washing linen regularly meant that it became worn more quickly than outerwear, but Mary was apparently forced to use her sheets in order to prolong the life of the shifts she already owned. Why Mary might have thought that she would need to keep these shifts to go into hospital is not made clear, although she was certainly a woman in ill health. Nevertheless, Ann Crew's deposition was most likely an attempt to present Mary's lack of linen – as well as Crew's own failure to wash it regularly – as the result of Mary's actions, rather than of deprivation by her husband.

Though he did not acknowledge whether he had supplied his wife with necessities, Corbert Vezey's own defence admitted to confining his wife to her room and locking her in. Indeed, it seems that several witnesses were aware of this fact; Mary's brother Richard Harrison told the court that when Vezey was away he could not get into the garret to see his sister, as 'he commonly took the Key with him.' When the court noted that it was 'very strange' that he knew that his sister was treated in this way but 'did not complain to a Magistrate,' Harrison replied 'Why, I did speak of it to some People, and they told me that no Body could hinder him from locking his Wife if he had a mind to it, for she was his Goods.'¹⁷⁸ This statement reflects perfectly the ambiguity which surrounded

¹⁷⁶ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁷⁷ Jonathon Andrews, 'The (un)dress of the mad poor in England, c. 1650-1850. Part 1,' *History of Psychiatry*, 18:1 (2007): 17.

¹⁷⁸ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

marital cruelty in this period. Of course, Harrison may have been justifying his own failure to act to the court, but the fact that several witnesses were well aware of Mary's confinement suggests that they may have understood these actions to fall within Vezey's rights as a husband. Indeed, as Elizabeth Foyster has shown, if marital violence 'was a response to disobedience which was threatening male honour, then it could be justified as a form of social control.'¹⁷⁹ In any case, it seems that little was done to challenge his actions before Mary's dramatic fall from the garret window brought the matter to the attention of the court.

Indeed, though Corbert Vezey stood accused of locking Mary up and detaining her against her will – and he himself admitted to this – his trial concentrated primarily on whether he had provided her with necessities. For his own part, Vezey claimed that he had confined his wife only after she had contracted a number of bad debts on his account: 'tho' I was a good Husband, and very careful and sparing, yet I found I was run out above 60 Pounds, for I was a 100 odd Pounds in debt, and had but 30 Pounds to pay it with.' We can draw parallels here with William Ettrick's claims that his wife had crippled him financially.¹⁸⁰ Vezey similarly implied that his wife had exploited her right to purchase necessities on his account, playing on contemporary stereotypes of women as excessive and selfish consumers. He also accused her of regularly stealing from him, claiming that she 'would take my Linen away and carry it out of Doors.' Though he had apparently forgiven her for this several times – and Vezey told the court that Mary had made 'many fair Promises' not to steal from him – in his defence he stated that 'if I had but a Farthing's-worth of Oatmeal, she would steal some of it.'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Foyster, 'Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating,' 224.

¹⁸⁰ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁸¹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

The jury eventually found Corbert Vezey not guilty of killing his wife, citing the Coroner's report to rule that 'Mary Vezey dy'd (by the visitation of God) of an Asthma.'¹⁸² It was made clear throughout the trial that Mary was a woman in very ill health, and a number of witnesses offered extraordinarily vivid descriptions of her wasted and decaying body. Christopher Best told the court

she shew'd me a Paper in which she had put some of the bits of her Skin as they peel'd off. They were all white and mouldy, and look'd just like her Legs which were cover'd over with a white Mold. Her Flesh was all over wasted, and black where it was not mouldy. - Her Flesh did I say? No; I mean her Skin, for I saw no sign of any Flesh that she had.¹⁸³

Both Anne and James Badily claimed that her discoloured skin made her 'look like an Anatomy,' while Sarah Brees described it as 'as black as Wainscot.' All emphasised that she was 'nothing but Skin and Bones,' and a surgeon witness similarly noted that she was 'prodigiously emaciated.'¹⁸⁴ This condition, as well as her death, was ruled to be the result of consumption rather than of her husband's cruelty. However, the trial still grants insight into the importance of material provision within a marriage. Fay Bound has argued that the 'giving, exchange, sharing and withholding of material interests' was central to understanding and performing marital relationships, and in this trial linen was one of the sites over which this was played out.¹⁸⁵ It demonstrates that linen was understood to be one of the necessities needed 'to sustain life,' as witnesses described how much linen Mary Vezey had access to, as well as whether it was washed regularly. By failing to provide his wife with linen necessities, it was alleged that Vezey had also failed to fulfil the material expectations of marriage. This was not only a failure of his legal obligation as Mary's husband, but was understood to pose a very real threat to her health. And, as in the previous

¹⁸² OBP, Corbert Vezey.

For an in-depth discussion of medical evidence presented in the Vezey trial, see Landsman, 'One Hundred Years of Rectitude,' 461, 467-68.

¹⁸³ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁸⁴ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

¹⁸⁵ Bound, 'Emotion in Early Modern England,' 190.

chapter, we find linen belonging to the same woman being used in different ways. Some witnesses deployed it as evidence of Vezey's guilt, alleging that he failed to provide sufficient, clean, and regularly washed linen for his wife. In contrast, other witnesses suggested that Mary was well provided for by describing what she was wearing, as well as the linen she had in her possession.

Conclusion

All women would need a regular supply of linen across their lifetime, as it was laundered regularly and worn out often. Owning at least one change of linen was therefore essential, and anything other than this signalled extreme poverty. Though scholars have emphasised visibly 'white' linen as a mark of respectability in the eighteenth century, this does not appear as a contemporary concern in any of the sources looked at in this chapter; none of the linen I have discussed here was described as 'white.' While some of the sources do discuss 'clean' linen, this was about items which were well washed, properly rinsed, warm, dry, and well aired. Clean linen was not just about projecting a 'respectable' appearance, but was inextricably linked with taking care of the body underneath. In this chapter, I have also explored the provision, maintenance, and replacement of linen across different stages in the life cycle, which had a decisive impact on this. At a number of points the life cycle, a woman was more likely to become reliant on other people to provide her with linen – for example, in pregnancy, illness, old age, or spinsterhood. Though married women were in theory always reliant on their husbands to provide them with necessities, we have seen that coverture did not always operate this way in practice.¹⁸⁶ However, Mary Vezey became materially reliant on her husband to provide her with necessities once she was confined to her garret room. Economic circumstance also had an important impact on women's experiences of these

¹⁸⁶ Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?' 365-55; Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England,' 707, 719-20; Erickson, *Women and Property*.

different stages in the life cycle. Though they were both single women, for example, the comfortably well-off single Sarah Mellish was able to provide her own linen, while Sarah Dawes was unable to do so. And, while Catherine Ettrick was able to bear the cost of obtaining a legal separation from her husband, Mary Vezey enjoyed no such option.

In this chapter, I have deliberately looked to a range of sources in order to explore how we might add to the information about linen gleaned from some of the sources looked at in the first half of this thesis. By doing so, I have demonstrated that the category of linen could be used as a rhetorical tool in a number of different contexts. In trials for infanticide, childbed linen provided powerful proof in favour of a woman's innocence. In begging letters and pauper appeals, owning no change of linen signalled extreme want, and there is evidence to suggest that parishes did regularly provide women with linen – and often with a change of linen. And, in the case of Mary Vezey, linen became one of the sites over which accusations of marital cruelty were played out. In most of these sources, linen was deployed as evidence for specific ends. In the letters she sent to James Lister, for example, Susannah Franks used Sarah Dawes's linen to establish a rhetoric of need in the hopes of securing charitable assistance. The use of linen in these sources appealed to wider understandings of its role, and I argue that linen could be used to establish, express, and perform different relationships in different contexts. In the infanticide trials, as well as in Corbert Vezey's trial for murder, discussion revolved around whether the defendant had fulfilled the material expectations expected of the relationship between mother and unborn child, or husband and wife; in both instances, demonstrating that the defendant had done so was used as evidence of their innocence. And, though Sarah Dawes was expected to provide her own linen, she became unable to do so due to old age and poverty. In these circumstances, the provision, maintenance, and replacement of her linen became a responsibility for someone else.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with three questions – where was women’s clothing described, and by whom? How was it described? And why? I have offered some clear answers to the first two, discussing both printed and manuscript texts in which descriptions of women’s clothing appear: wills, newspaper advertisements, accounts, bills, ‘how-to’ manuals, court records, and correspondence. And, of course, women’s clothing was also described in a number of other sources which this thesis has not looked at – diaries, trade advertisements, periodicals, and novels are just a few examples. Indeed, one of my arguments is that descriptions of clothing were increasingly circulated across different texts as the century wore on, and I have demonstrated this most clearly in chapter one. We also need to remember that these descriptions were not just written down, but also appeared in everyday verbal interactions for which no records survive. Some of the sources I have looked at in this thesis hint at this – at the servant who passed on details of a lost and stolen advert, the single woman who discussed a commission with her mantuamaker, the pauper who described her material want to the Overseer of the Poor, or the wife who planned her suit for separation with a legal representative. Taking into account these unrecorded interactions is important, as it suggests that we should think twice about investing the act of description with such ‘care’ in the writing down of it.

This also leads us onto the question of who was describing women’s clothing, and the short answer to this would be ‘many people.’ We do not just find women describing their own clothing, but Overseers, husbands, friends, neighbours, merchants, milliners, servants, and even strangers doing so as well. This is significant in terms of how clothing was described. I have shown that the words individual women were using to describe their clothing in the pages of their wills or account books were not unusual. Rather, I argue that these women

were using a language readily available to, and easily understood by, a wide range of people. So, while a woman might describe her own 'Green Damask Petticoat,' in all likelihood she could also describe her neighbour's petticoat in much the same way.¹ Clothing was most often described by textile and colour, but the decorative qualities of the fabric or the embellishments applied to it were sometimes included – for example, 'my red and white flowered Gown' or 'a worked Muslin Apron.'² This language appealed to a multisensory knowledge, as the name of a fabric might have evoked details about its weight, tactile quality, or the sound it made as it moved, as well as conjuring up a visual image of it. We also saw linen described as 'dirty' or 'foul' in the lost and stolen adverts, as well as in the trial of Corbert Vezey, which appealed to a sense of smell. This is why an understanding of will-writing as an exercise in visualisation is too simplistic, as are arguments that the importance of linen lay primarily in its visible 'whiteness.'³ We need to remember that people's knowledge of textiles in the eighteenth century was not simply visual, but that these descriptive words also appealed to this widely shared material literacy.

Although the sources looked at in this thesis employed a similar descriptive language, some differences do emerge between them. For example, fabrics listed in account books often had a price per yard or ell attached to them, which, as I demonstrate in chapter two, was information most likely copied over from a bill issued by a mercer or linen-draper. In the lost and stolen adverts, clothing was described in temporary states like clean, dirty, wet, or unmade, reflecting the processes of maintenance, upkeep, and making which are also recorded in account books. Finally, the wills are the only source in which categories like 'best' and 'worst' – or variants thereof – appear. When writing a will, women

¹ BOR, D&C Court, reel 1254, Ruth Tennyson, January 1764.

² BOR, D&C Court, reel 1255, Mary Flint, July 1782; BCD, *Daily Advertiser*, 14 August 1772.

³ Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40-41, 2-3; Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life*, 115; Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort*, 144; Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, 60-62.

were able to consider their wardrobes as a whole, and assigned categories to items of clothing in this context. 'Best' was the term used most commonly and consistently by women from across the social hierarchy, and, as we have seen, in the scholarship 'best' has usually been conceived of as part of a binary in which 'everyday,' 'working,' or 'common' is the other part. This has been understood by John Styles and others as the means by which all but the very poorest members of society ordered their clothing, which Styles argues was largely driven by the customary calendar; 'everyday' or 'working' clothing was worn on a daily basis, while 'best' or 'holiday' clothing was worn on 'high days and holidays.'⁴ For the women of the middling classes and gentry, however, 'best' and 'common' have been interpreted as more personal – and even emotional – categories. Maxine Berg, for example, has argued that the fact that women used these categories to describe their possessions is evidence that their bequests were 'carefully described,' and that they therefore held some emotional meaning.⁵

However, I demonstrate in chapter one that a distinction in the way that women from across the social hierarchy deployed these categories cannot be drawn from the sample of wills. Moreover, I would argue that attempting to determine the meaning of 'best' or 'worst' from these documents alone is unproductive. Some women employed their own gradations between the two terms, for example, while 'my best' was not always attached to specific items of clothing in the wills. Some testatrixes employed it with more flexibility, perhaps preparing for a change in which items of clothing would be 'best' at the time of their death, or leaving it to the discretion of the executrix to determine what belonged to this category. Indeed, I argue that the use of these categories does suggest that women expected the (often female) administrators of their wills to recognise

⁴ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 305-306.

See also Tankard, "I think myself honestly decked," 25; Tankard, "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings," 19.

⁵ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes,' 421.

and understand them. This was most likely an understanding born from familiarity with the testatrix's wardrobe rather than a popular category of clothing, and the absence of these words in the lost and stolen adverts seems to confirm this. To recognise which clothing was someone's 'best' or 'worst,' one needed access to contextual information about that person's status, wealth, as well as the rest of their clothing.

So, this thesis has offered some clear responses to the question of where women's clothing was being described, as well as how, and by whom; the third question – why? – is much more difficult to answer. My analysis in the first half of the thesis is concentrated on challenging an answer put forward to this question by many scholars, which is that description was a way for people to express emotion. As we have seen, this interpretation has most often been applied to women's wills, as bequests of clothing have been interpreted again and again as evidence of women's emotional and sentimental attachments. Although this stems partly from the fact that women who bequeathed clothing were extremely likely to leave it other women, sentiment has also been read into the act of description. By singling out and describing an item, both Maxine Berg and Marcia Pointon argue, the testatrix endowed it with some emotional meaning.⁶ Three things have contributed to this reading of women's wills; the first is that wills are understood to be inherently emotional documents, dealing as they do with death and the dispersal of an individual's worldly goods. The second is that the words used to describe clothing – and other things – in the pages of these wills were most likely the testatrix's own, which were usually dictated to a scribe or clerk. These descriptions have therefore been interpreted as offering glimpses of an authentic voice nestled amongst generic legal phraseology. Finally, as I suggest in the introduction to this thesis, this interpretation builds on the argument that women engaged in a 'sentimental'

⁶ Berg, 'Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England,' 421, 418; Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, 40.

form of consumption, which was first put forward in the 1990s. And, as we have seen, this argument has rarely been challenged.

Through an analysis of clothing bequests in a sample of women's wills dating between 1696 and 1830 in chapter one, however, I argue that the evidence for this is not there. Though scholars have paid the most attention to bequests which include detailed descriptions of clothing, I demonstrate that this was only one type of clothing bequest amongst many; many women, for example, simply bequeathed their 'wearing apparel.' Moreover, less than a third of the women in my sample left any kind of clothing bequest whatsoever, suggesting that we might need to reassess the emphasis placed on this in the scholarship on clothing. My analysis in this chapter supports the conclusion that women were overwhelmingly likely to leave bequests of clothing to other women, and I contribute further to this by suggesting that the women in my sample also seem to have preferred female custodians and distributors for these bequests. I argue, however, that these bequests of clothing are evidence of what Amy Erickson calls 'personalism,' rather than emotion.⁷ Women's wills were more likely than men's to be concerned with dispersing moveable goods to a wide range of (often female) family members, friends, and acquaintances. But, the fact that the majority of women bequeathed their clothing in this way does not tell us that these testatrices were all expressing sentimental attachments. Rather, it shows that bequeathing items of clothing within these circles was an established – and perhaps even expected – practice. A productive way forward from this might therefore be to map in more detail *who* bequests of clothing were going to; as we have seen, some women bequeathed clothing to servants, while scholars have suggested that 'best' clothing was most likely to go to friends or family. This might tell us something more about the material expectations of these relationships, as well as a wider culture of bequests.

⁷ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 213-25.

In chapter one, I also look at the description of clothing in 212 lost and stolen adverts, which were placed in the *Daily Advertiser* between 1731 and 1796. Detailed description in this context has been read as ‘superfluous’ by Jonathon Lamb, who argues that these advertisements were directed towards someone who knew very well what an item looked like – the thief.⁸ Description has also been interpreted as evidence of emotion in this context, as a declaration of loss, need, or desire on the part of the advertiser.⁹ It is usually assumed that the author of a lost and stolen advert was the very same person who was missing the things it describes, but in my discussion of these adverts I demonstrate that determining authorship is more complicated than this. For example, we find adverts placed by washerwomen describing their clients’ linen, servants describing their mistress’s clothing, people who had found or ‘stopped’ items of lost or stolen clothing, and it is not unlikely that some of these adverts were placed by the person who had stolen these things themselves. These adverts therefore needed to use a language of description which could be widely recognised and easily passed along.

In the final part of chapter one, I draw the wills and lost and stolen adverts together in order to look at the language of description used across them. By doing so, I make two key arguments. The first is that the use of detailed description rose in both sources over the course of the century; building on the work of Cynthia Sundberg Wall, I argue that, as a wider variety of things became available, so too did descriptions of these things increasingly circulate across a number of sources to create a ‘common landscape of things.’¹⁰ My second argument is that these two sources share a language of description, which was readily available and widely understood. Though the descriptions of clothing in wills were undoubtedly the testatrix’s own, she was therefore deploying a

⁸ Lamb, ‘The Crying of Lost Things,’ 950.

⁹ Campbell, ‘Domestic Intelligence,’ 252; Lamb, ‘The Crying of Lost Things,’ 959-60; Lamb, *The Things Things Say*, 37-38.

¹⁰ Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 9.

popular language of description to which she had ready access. Some differences in description do emerge between these two sources, but this is because they were intended for very different purposes; the use of personal categories like 'best,' for example, would not make sense in the context of an advert. And, in the adverts we find things described as 'unmade,' 'wet,' or 'foul,' as these texts describe the state an item of clothing was in immediately before it went missing. In contrast, wills dealt with the future of the testatrix's possessions. In this chapter, I therefore make a clear intervention in the scholarship on consumption as I argue that the evidence for women's 'sentimental' or 'emotional' attachments cannot be found in bequests of clothing. Moreover, by demonstrating that there existed a widely understood language of description across these two sources, I challenge readings which isolate detailed description as evidence for emotion. This challenge continues in chapter two.

In chapter two, I turn to another source which is a staple in studies of consumption: account books. I look first at the impact of some of the different stages in the life cycle on clothing expenditure. There has been an emphasis in the literature on married and widowed women accounting for the household, and so I offer a detailed analysis of the expenditure of the single Sarah Mellish here. By comparing Sarah Mellish's expenditure on clothing with that of the widowed Dorothy Chambers, I demonstrate that Mellish dedicated a higher proportion of her yearly expenditure on clothing. However, drawing on the account book of Mrs Plumbe, I also suggest that a significant difference between the expenditure of a single woman and a married or widowed one rests in how much of it was dedicated to clothing for people. As a single woman with fewer dependents, Sarah Mellish was able (or even obliged) to dedicate most of her expenditure on clothing to herself. In this section, I also argue that the emphasis on the household in the scholarship is not useful for all women. Through an analysis of account books belonging to several members of the Mellish family, I demonstrate that, though the single Sarah Mellish did not account for a household, she did belong to the family as a unit of accounting. Finally, in this

section I briefly consider some of the methodological issues raised by this analysis, as I suggest that we will never be able to calculate with absolute certainty an individual's expenditure on clothing from their account book. Finally, I argue that scholars need to stop thinking of women's account books in isolation, and I expand on this in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

I return to the use of description in the second section of chapter two. Like the lost and stolen adverts, detailed description in account books has been interpreted as unnecessary, and therefore as meaningful when included – especially in what are understood to be otherwise unemotional documents. Description, and the description of clothing in particular, has been read as 'symbolic,' or as evidence of pride, delight, and even vanity.¹¹ Even when it is not explicitly cited as evidence of emotion, scholars still write about the description of clothing as 'careful' or 'meticulous.' In this section, I argue again that description cannot be read in this way. Detailed description was a regular aspect of women's accounting practices, and I also demonstrate that the descriptions of clothing found in account books share a descriptive language with the wills and lost and stolen adverts discussed in chapter one. Finally, I make a clear methodological intervention into the study of women's account books, as I argue that we need to integrate the processes of textual transmission into our reading of these sources. By offering an analysis of three sets of bills, I demonstrate that the descriptions of clothing found in women's account books were likely moved over from other texts.

In the first half of the thesis, I therefore demonstrate that detailed description has been isolated and incorrectly interpreted as evidence of emotion by scholars. Through detailed source analysis, I argue that it is not possible to read descriptions of clothing in wills, lost and stolen adverts, or account books in this

¹¹ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 103-104; Pitman, 'Prodigal Years?' 12-13.

way. This has important implications for arguments in the scholarship about the emotional or sentimental consumption of women, as I demonstrate that the evidence previously deployed in support of this is not there. These conclusions might also be extended beyond women's clothing, as I show that description is limited in what it can reveal about the meanings these things held for their owners. Though clothing has certainly been interpreted as the most emotionally potent possession for women, similar claims have been made about the description of other things. Lorna Weatherill, for example, writes that in Richard Latham's account book a detailed description of a covering stone for his mother's grave 'suggests that he attached symbolic importance to it.'¹²

Moreover, I argue that we do not just need to stop looking to description in isolation for evidence of emotion, but that the study of consumption needs to revise its approach to emotion in line with recent scholarship on the history of emotions. There is a growing consensus in the history of emotions that they are not constant across time, and that the way a society understands, expresses, and represents emotion is central to its experience of it.¹³ In other words, we need to look at how contemporaries defined, wrote about, and represented different emotions in order to understand how these emotions were expressed and performed. The discussion of women's emotional engagement with their things in the 1990s seems to have been rooted largely in what scholars thought women should feel, rather than an historical and cultural context. The terms used to describe this engagement also remain decidedly ill-defined and vague – it is 'sentimental' or 'emotional,' or has some sort of 'emotional meaning.' These emotions are also assumed to be largely positive. Though the history of emotions was still in its infancy when these arguments were first put forward, we need to revise these assumptions in light of this. Finally, I argue that by

¹² Weatherill, *The Account Book of Richard Latham*, xv.

¹³ Matt and Stearns, 'Introduction,' 2; Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart*, 14-15; Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 32; Gouk and Hills, 'Towards Histories of Emotions,' 15.

looking to detailed description, scholars seem to be searching for glimpses of real or authentic emotion; however, all the people of the past have left behind are traces of the expression and performance of emotion, rather than emotion itself.

Some wider issues also emerge from chapters one and two, and the first is the gendering of emotion. As we have seen, scholars have argued that women were more emotional about their possessions – and especially their clothing – than men. However, though descriptions of clothing in women's account books have been singled out as 'meticulous' or 'careful,' it is those in men's account books which have been most explicitly interpreted as emotional. Here, 'unnecessary' description is seen as evidence of pride or delight in new clothing. This is likely the result of an understanding of accounting as an exercise in accuracy, and may be based on an assumption that the description of clothing in men's account books was not rational. In contrast, as we have seen, women's accounting has largely been understood to revolve around the household. These interpretations echo the gendered pattern of consumption outlined by Vickery and others, whereby the purchases of married women were primarily intended for provisioning the household, while those of their husbands were personal and impulsive.¹⁴ While scholars have argued that women's consumption was about sentiment and emotion expressed towards other people, men have been understood to feel a more personal delight or pride in their clothing. As we have seen, some studies have also attempted to argue that men were just as thoughtful and emotional in their consumption as were women.¹⁵ However, I demonstrate in this thesis that the evidence previously deployed in support of women's sentimental consumption is not sufficient; this might also make us

¹⁴ Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 16; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 12-13; Styles and Vickery, 'Introduction,' 7; Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making,' 164.

¹⁵ Finn, 'Men's Things,' 133-34, 153; Lambert, 'Death and Memory,' 46-59; Lambert, 'Small Presents Confirm Friendship,' 24-32

think in more detail about how emotion was gendered in the past, as well as how historians have gendered it in the present.

Questions about the relationship between authorship and emotion also emerge across the sources I look at in the first half of the thesis. It is only descriptions by the owner of a thing which have been interpreted as emotional – for example, in the wills and account books. However, in chapters one and two I demonstrate that authorship is not always straightforward, as, for example, descriptions of clothing recorded in women's account books may have been moved over from a bill written by a man. Emotions surrounding clothing are therefore conceived of as proprietorial, as well as largely positive. But what about other people? Did women only feel for their own clothing? These are questions not easily answered, but they are worth bearing in mind when considering the relationship between individual women and their clothing. Moreover, I argue that we should explore further the negative emotions which might have been associated with clothing; for example, the pauper letters for appeal analysed by Steven King and Peter Jones suggest that absent or insufficient clothing was bound up with the rhetoric of shame.¹⁶

Finally, I have demonstrated in the first half of the thesis that there is a wider problem with how scholars write about description. Even when studies do not explicitly make a link between description and emotion, an overwhelming number of scholars still write of the 'meticulous,' 'careful,' or 'minutely detailed' description of clothing by women. This singles these descriptions out for attention and, subconsciously or not, invests them with intent and meaning on the part of the author. This is perhaps partly because some of the words which appear are so unfamiliar to many of us; for example, terms like bombazine, calamanco, cambric, dimity, Holland, lustring, paduasoy, poplin, sarsenet, stuff,

¹⁶ King, "I Fear You Will Think Me Too Presumptuous," 212; Jones, "I cannot keep my place without being deascent," 31-32.

and tabby are no longer in common usage. However, adding 'meticulous' almost reflexively in front of every discussion of description suggests a time or care over the act which is belied by the very frequency with which it was used in the sources I discuss.

I also argue that we need to recognise that the descriptive landscape of the past is different to our own. What may seem unusual or unnecessary to us appealed to a popular knowledge – the look of an item, its weight, drape, how it felt, or the sound that it made as it moved – which provided clear points of reference for eighteenth-century men and women. And, at the other end of the scale, contemporaries were able to 'fill in' details of descriptions which may appear sparse to us. In chapter four, for example, I demonstrate that 'linen' as a category was widely recognised and understood. Moreover, scholars often seem to assume a minimum level of description required for a specific source, but what these assumptions are based on remains unclear. We saw that this is the case with accounting, for example, as detailed description has been interpreted as somehow unnecessary for the keeping of accurate accounts. I would argue that we need to think more carefully about making claims like this. If we take the wills, for instance, we can see that description served a very necessary purpose. Though some women bequeathed all their 'wearing apparel,' others left specific items of clothing to individuals. In order to avoid any confusion or dispute over these instructions, a testatrix needed to ensure that they were as clear as possible. Let's say she owned three gowns, but wanted to leave a specific one to her sister. Saying 'my gown' is simply not enough in this context. Two of these gowns might be made of silk and one of linen, and so bequeathing her 'silk gown' would still not offer enough descriptive detail to make her instructions clear. If one silk gown was green and the other black, however, bequeathing her 'green silk gown' would enable the administrators of her will to carry out her post-mortem instructions effectively.

In the second half of the thesis I argue for a move away from focusing on description in isolation, and suggest some more productive answers to the question of why women's clothing was being described. By doing so, I respond to calls in the scholarship to focus more on things in use; however, in these two chapters I also demonstrate that we need to explore how and why clothing was being used in different sources.¹⁷ In chapter three, I therefore offer an in-depth case study of one suit for separation, which was first brought in front of the church courts by Catherine Ettrick in 1765. Though trials for theft have been effectively mined by scholars of consumption, other types of litigation have remained underexplored; however, in this chapter I demonstrate what can be gained from bringing together the historiography on consumption with that on marital violence and breakdown. Clothing in the Ettrick case occupies an ambiguous position, as Catherine Ettrick's clothing was described in different ways by different people. Nevertheless, I argue that this is an asset, rather than a limitation of using this kind of source material. Previous studies of marital separation have usually analysed a number of suits together in order to establish common themes across them – for example, clothing as a tool for destruction or deprivation used by men against women.¹⁸ By doing so, however, they tend to conflate a number of different documents which use clothing in different ways and for different – and often contradictory – purposes. I therefore use a methodological approach throughout this chapter which distinguishes between the narratives presented to the court, as well as the different documents generated by this suit. This is a methodology which can be applied to other types of litigation, and, indeed, I take a similar approach to a trial for murder in chapter four.

¹⁷ Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History,' 297-98; Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel, 'Rethinking inventories in the digital age,' 2.

¹⁸ See, for example Hunt, 'Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence,' 18-19; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*.

In the first section of chapter three, I explore how and why Catherine Ettrick's clothing was described in the different narratives presented to the court, and demonstrate that these descriptions were used to lend support to opposing claims. I then move on to a discussion of clothing in use, looking at how the movement of clothing and people was used to signal disorder in the Ettrick household. I argue here that clothing was given a more active role than has previously been recognised in studies of marital breakdown, as it influenced events and shaped the narratives presented in court. I am also critical of methodological approaches which look to court records for glimpses of accurate or authentic detail, as I demonstrate that the use of clothing in this suit for separation was very much deliberate. Finally, the use of clothing in the Ettrick suit for separation demonstrates that marriage had very material expectations, which William Ettrick had allegedly failed to fulfil; I explore material expectations of different relationships in more detail in chapter four, but suggest here that this might offer potential to explore how clothing was used to express and perform the emotions expected of marriage.

Chapter four offers a different approach, taking the category of 'linen' as a starting point in order to look across sources. It adds to the more static descriptions of linen found in other sources – for example, wills and accounts – by looking at how and why it was being deployed in different contexts. I also make an intervention throughout the chapter into discussions of the role of 'white' linen in demonstrating respectability, as I argue that the sources suggest a different set of contemporary concerns. In the first section of this chapter, I explore in detail the material expectations of motherhood by looking at the role of childbed linen in 216 trials for infanticide, which were heard in the Old Bailey between 1680 and 1830. The role that childbed linen could play in these trials has already been noted by a number of scholars, but I contribute to this by exploring in more detail how and why it was deployed as evidence. I argue that childbed linen was used to lend rhetorical – and often material – weight to the defendant's claims to innocence, which in turn speaks to wider understandings

of its role. Gathering childbed linen announced to the wider world that a woman had begun to fulfil the material expectations of motherhood, and this became an even more performative act in the context of an infanticide trial.

I turn to the provision of linen for single women in the second section of chapter four. While single women were responsible for providing, maintaining, and replacing their own linen, I look at Sarah Dawes, who became unable to do so in her old age. Offering an analysis of correspondence between Dawes and the Lister family, I argue that linen was used as a rhetorical tool in ‘begging letters’ written on her behalf. By drawing on three sets of Overseers’ Accounts from parishes in York, I demonstrate that it was owning no change of linen which provided the most powerful evidence of poverty. Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I offer an in-depth analysis of one trial for murder, applying a similar methodological approach to that used in chapter three. In 1732, Corbert Vezey stood accused of killing his wife Mary by making an assault on her, locking her up against her will in a garret room, and depriving her of ‘sufficient Meat, Drink, and other Necessaries to sustain life.’¹⁹ Linen was understood to be one of these necessities, and I explore how descriptions of Mary’s linen were used to support opposing claims over the course of the trial. Some witnesses cited missing or dirty linen as evidence of Vezey’s failure to fulfil the material expectations placed on him as a husband, while others told the court that Mary had in fact had access to sufficient, ‘good,’ and ‘clean’ linen.

By exploring the role of linen in these three different contexts, I demonstrate some of the material expectations attached to different relationships. I also argue that looking at how and why linen was used in these sources grants insight into wider understandings of its role; the provision of childbed linen, for example, was inextricably linked in the contemporary imagination with

¹⁹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

preparedness for motherhood. In the case of Sarah Dawes, owning no change of linen represented her poverty, and begging letters sent on her behalf by Susannah Franks emphasised the burden of washing Dawes's linen. And, in the trial of Corbert Vezey, linen appeared as one of the necessities to which a wife was entitled.

In the second half of the thesis I therefore demonstrate some more productive approaches, as well as new sources, for the study of women and their clothing. In particular, I argue for a move away from focusing on description in isolation, and suggest that we should instead explore how descriptions of clothing were being used in different contexts. I also argue that scholars of consumption should turn their attention to court records beyond trials for theft and engage with the historiographies surrounding different kinds of litigation. For example, in chapter three I demonstrate some of the benefits of drawing on the scholarship on marital violence and breakdown. If we look to court records only for confirmation of the things people owned and used, we must find ourselves disappointed. However, I argue that exploring the rhetorical work women's clothing was doing in this context can yield wider insight into contemporary understandings of its role. Finally, though I argue in the first half of this thesis for a revisionist approach to emotion in studies of consumption, emotion is largely absent from my analysis in chapters three and four. This is because the sources I look at show very clearly that different relationships had specific material expectations attached to them, but offer less insight into the emotional expectations of these relationships. This is not to argue that the two are separate; indeed, William Ettrick's cruelty towards his wife was figured as a material *and* an emotional failure to fulfil what was expected of him as a husband, showing that the two were linked in the contemporary imagination.

Both halves of this thesis look across the female life cycle in order to examine the impact of its different stages on consumption. For example, in chapter two I

demonstrate that the household as a unit of accounting was not as central for many single women as it was for their married or widowed counterparts. This approach also allows for some conclusions to be drawn across sources. I argue in chapter one that, though the clothing bequests of single women have been read as particularly emotional, for many of these women clothing and moveable goods simply formed the bulk of the items available to them to bequeath. This is supported by my discussion in chapter two, as I show that single women spent a higher proportion of their yearly expenditure to clothing than did married or widowed women, and that the bulk of this was dedicated to their own clothing.

I also argue throughout the thesis that women's experiences of the life cycle were intimately connected to economic position. Though previous studies have tended to approach one group in the social hierarchy at a time, I have examined the clothing of a range of women from members the gentry classes to paupers reliant on the parish. Though I do not pretend to speak equally to the experiences of all of these women, by taking this approach I have attempted to draw some useful parallels between them. For example, both Catherine Ettrick and Mary Vezey were married women, but their economic circumstances meant that they experienced marital breakdown very differently; Catherine was able to bear the costs of bringing a suit for separation in front of the church courts, while Mary could not. And, the level of necessities both women were entitled to was also understood to be very different. Catherine claimed that her husband had only bought one silk gown for her, and the rest of her gowns were made of 'Common Stuff' and 'Linnen' and not appropriate to her station.²⁰ In contrast, in the trial of Corbert Vezey the court sought to establish whether he had provided his wife with access to the minimum level of necessities 'to sustain life.'²¹

²⁰ BOR, CP.I.1503.

²¹ OBP, Corbert Vezey.

In this thesis, I also show that there were points in the life cycle in which women were more likely to become reliant on others to provide them with clothing, and this was exacerbated by poverty. While widowhood or spinsterhood could be a period of economic freedom for some women, for others it was one in which they became reliant on private charity or the parish. Old age, illness, and infirmity could make a tough economic position even worse, and regularly find women turning to the parish in the final years of their life.²² Women in service also run throughout this thesis as ‘involuntary consumers’ – that is, as the recipients of clothing bequests and purchases from their mistresses.²³ Though this may suggest a reliance on others, it also speaks to the material expectations of the relationship between mistress and servant. We also found in chapter four that servants were the group of women most likely to be accused of infanticide, as they were forced to conceal their pregnancies from their employers. An illegitimate pregnancy could prove financially crippling for a single woman who had lost her place, and women provided with relief by the parish during pregnancy and childbirth often reappear in the Overseers’ Accounts at a later date. The life cycle and economic circumstance were therefore central to the consumption of clothing by women, and have also impacted on the sources which survive as evidence for this; for example, though middling and gentry accountants recorded their own expenditure on clothing, the clothing of pauper women was accounted for by somebody else.

In the final part of this conclusion, I am going to briefly consider some of the wider implications of this thesis as a whole. The first implication concerns gendered consumption. There can be no doubt that consumption in the eighteenth century was gendered, as just a few examples from this thesis demonstrate – we find women providing household textiles, gathering childbed linen, making shirts for their sons, and bequeathing clothing to female family

²² Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*, 101.

²³ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 255.

members and friends. I suggest in chapter three that we might explore in more detail how these gendered practices were used to perform the emotional expectations of relationships. Nevertheless, I also argue that we should not mistake gendered patterns of consumption for evidence of an authentic emotional experience. This is why providing counterpart claims on the part of men – that they were *also* thoughtful and emotional consumers – is not useful, as I demonstrate that there is a lack of evidence for women's sentimental consumption. I want to emphasise again the debt owed to feminist scholars of the 1990s, who drew attention to women and their things and established it as a legitimate area of scholarship. However, as Karen Harvey has recently argued in a discussion of domesticity, simply putting men 'back into the historical record' is not enough. Rather, we need to 'consider the revision of that historical record.'²⁴

Issues of gendered consumption are also bound up with arguments about agency. Agency is not a theme I have explicitly explored in this thesis, though I touch on it in chapters three and four. Nevertheless, it is worth drawing out a few more threads here. Much of the early scholarship on women and consumption responded to contemporary claims that women were acquisitive, selfish, and competitive spenders, by arguing that they were thoughtful, careful, and skilled consumers instead. However, it was also clear that women were restricted by prescriptive patterns of consumption. We now know that coverture was not always as restrictive in practice as it was in theory, and a growing scholarship on businesswomen and female investors is demonstrating that women had financial authority beyond the household.²⁵ However, early arguments for a specific form of sentimental consumption not only countered a negative stereotype of the female consumer, but gave women an agency within the confines of a patriarchal system of consumption. This is perhaps one of the

²⁴ Harvey, 'Men Making Home,' 525.

²⁵ For example, see Wiskin, 'Businesswomen and financial management,' 143-59; Froide, *Silent Partners*; Phillips, *Women in Business*, 1-20.

reasons why these arguments have remained largely unchallenged. Indeed, the idea that women were able to exercise agency through a sentimental engagement with their things remains an alluring one, though I demonstrate in this thesis that the evidence deployed does not support this. This is not to argue, however, that women could not express agency through their clothing. We will never know how much involvement Catherine Ettrick had in the narrative presented to the court in her suit for separation, and she did allege that her husband had used her clothing against her. However, her clothing was also used as a tool to support her claims to good economy and frugality, and acted as evidence of her husband's failure to provide for her. Similarly, claiming to have gathered childbed linen – or presenting childbed linen in court – could be used as proof of innocence by women facing the charge of infanticide. Both examples reflect a very limited agency, as these women found themselves in a disadvantaged position; nevertheless, they do suggest that, rather than looking to description alone, we should rather look to how clothing could be used by women as a material and rhetorical tool for evidence of agency.

As I outlined in the introduction, clothing has been interpreted as one of the most emotionally potent possessions, though I have not found evidence for this emotional and sentimental investment in the sources looked at in this thesis. This analysis begs the wider question of whether clothing really was so different to other things. We have already seen critiques of the role clothing has been assumed to play in the performance of identity, as well as of the 'consumption as communication' thesis.²⁶ Does this therefore lead to the conclusion that clothing has wrongly been privileged in studies of consumption? For example, are a watch and a gown essentially the same? I would still argue that is not the case; for a start, both John Styles and Beverly Lemire have demonstrated that a

²⁶ Miller, *Stuff*, 13; Campbell, 'When the meaning is not a message,' 349; Campbell, 'The Modern Western Fashion Pattern,' 14.

stock of clothing could function as an important source of currency in itself.²⁷ Clothing also needed to be constantly maintained, and was replaced much more frequently than more durable possessions. This was especially the case for linen, which was closely linked in the contemporary imagination with caring for the body. Finally, all women *needed* clothing, and I demonstrate in chapters three and four that it was one of the necessities which husbands were expected to provide for their wives. And, as we have seen, owning no change of clothing was a sign of extreme poverty. While the evidence does not support claims that clothing was the most emotional possession available, it was still the most ubiquitous.

Another implication of this thesis concerns the use of sources, not only for the study of clothing, but for other consumer goods as well. There remains an assumption that we must make do with glimpses gleaned from a patchwork of sources, especially as we move further down the social hierarchy. However, this does not give scholars licence to ignore the circumstances in which these different sources were produced, and I demonstrate throughout this thesis that paying attention to the purpose a source was intended for yields important insights. By doing so, I make a number of methodological interventions which are relevant for the scholarship on consumption, as well as the wider use of these sources. I demonstrate in both chapters one and two that scholars have incorrectly read detailed descriptions as evidence of authentic emotion, and in chapter two I argue for an approach to women's account books which pays proper attention to the processes of textual transmission. In chapter three I suggest a methodology which distinguishes between the different documents generated by one suit for separation, and argue that we should be exploring the different narratives presented in court. Finally, in both chapters three and four I show that we should turn our attention to clothing as a rhetorical tool, rather than focusing on the description of it in isolation. I also argue in the second half

²⁷ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 145; Styles, 'Custom or Consumption?' 107.

of the thesis that we can – and should – widen the net of sources we use to study consumption, as I demonstrate that exploring the imagined and rhetorical alongside the real can only expand our insight into the role of clothing in contemporary understandings. Lastly, the conclusions I reach in this thesis – and especially in the first two chapters – might throw into question methodological approaches taken to other kinds of source materials in the scholarship on consumption. For example, letters and diaries have been thought to grant the most direct insight into how people felt about their things, but we should also be asking the same questions of them: how were things being described in these sources? By whom? And why?

Finally, what of the move to the material in studies of consumption? I would argue that we should not be looking to objects simply for confirmation of what we think textual sources have already told us – that women were emotional and sentimental consumers. As we have seen, objects have been invested with emotional meaning by scholars; for instance, darning and patching in surviving garments has been read as a ‘labour of love,’ while Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway have argued that the investment of women’s time in textiles imbued them with an ‘emotional meaning’ which can still be gauged hundreds of years later.²⁸ However, I argue in this thesis that scholars should not be searching for traces or glimpses of authentic emotion in the description of clothing, and this can be equally applied to the study of objects. This is not to say that there are no fruitful approaches to the study of objects and emotion, and, indeed, the recent volume *Feeling Things* offers a number of productive ways forward by suggesting that objects are something people ‘do’ emotion with; however, I argue that we should be looking to *how* objects were used to construct, perform, and express emotion, rather than attempting to identify any inherent or authentic emotion in the thing itself.²⁹ Some studies have begun to do this, though the lure of the

²⁸ Fennetaux, ‘Sentimental Economics,’ 137-38; Dolan and Holloway, ‘Emotional Textiles,’ 155.

²⁹ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, ‘Introduction,’ 1-7.

inherently emotional textile remains strong. And lastly, as the scholarship turns to the material we should not assume that we have simply worn textual sources out – that they have told us all they can, and we must now look to objects to fill in the gaps. As I have shown in this thesis, there remains much to be unpicked from them.

Appendix 1.

Words used to describe clothing in wills proved by the Dean and Chapter Court of York, 1686-1830¹

		1696-1710	1711-1720	1721-1730	1731-1740	1741-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1830	Total times used
Unspecified	'Clothes,' 'cloths,' 'wearing apparel,' etc.	2	3	10	2	5	3	13	9	12	10	29	98
													98
Colour	Colours, e.g 'red,' 'black'			2	1	7	1	19	13	26	13	11	93
	Dark					1							1
													94

¹ BOR, D&C Court, microform, reels 1249-1259.

		1696- 1710	1711- 1720	1721- 1730	1731- 1740	1741- 1750	1751- 1760	1761- 1770	1771- 1780	1781- 1790	1791- 1800	1801- 1830	Total times used
Fabric	Bombazine									1			1
	Calico							1	1				2
	Calamanco			1	1							1	3
	Camblet					1		1					2
	Cambric							3	1	1			5
	Chintz									1			1
	Chintz Holland					1							1
	Cloth							2	2	1			5
	Cotton					1				1		1	3
	Crape							1	1				2
	Damask							3		2	1		6
	Derry					1							1
	Dimity							2	1				3
	Flannel							1	2	1			4
	Gauze							1					1
	Irish stuff					1							1
	Kentish							1					1
	Lawn								1				1

		1696-1710	1711-1720	1721-1730	1731-1740	1741-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1830	Total times used
	Linen							1		2			3
	Linen/linens (collective)			5		2	2	4	4	5	2	9	33
	Lustring			1				2	1				4
	Manchester cotton								1				1
	Muslin							5	1	2	2		10
	Poplin								1	2			3
	Rigge									1			1
	Sarsenet			1									1
	Satin							2	1	1	4		8
	Serge		1										1
	Silk			1		3		3	4	5	5	2	23
	Silk/silky stuff							1			1		2
	Stamped linen									1			1
	Stuff											1	1
	Tabby							1	1				2

		1696-1710	1711-1720	1721-1730	1731-1740	1741-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1830	Total times used
	Velvet					1							1
	Woollen and linen (collective)			4		1	1	2		1			9
													147
Fabric quality	Fine								1				1
													1
Decoration	Figured							1					1
	Flowered							1	1	1	1		4
	Laced							1	1	2		1	5
	My own work								1				1
	Plain							1	1				2
	Quilted								3	1			4
	Sprig									1			1
	Spotted								1			1	2

		1696-1710	1711-1720	1721-1730	1731-1740	1741-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1830	Total times used
	Stamped									2			2
	Striped							3	1	1			5
	Worked								1				1
	Wrought								1				1
													29
Age	Old					1			1				2
	New				1			1	1	3			6
													8
Personal categories	Best			3	1	1		5	5	7	7	7	36
	Best part									1			1
	Best second										1		1
	Best sort									1			1
	Better part											1	1
	Common											2	2
	Day							1					1
	Everyday					2	1						3

		1696-1710	1711-1720	1721-1730	1731-1740	1741-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1830	Total times used
	Inferior										1		1
	Least valuable part											1	1
	Second best										1		1
	Worst									2			2
	Worst part									1			1
													52
Other	Child bed linen							1					1
	Mourning											2	2
	Of my own spinning									1			1
													4

Appendix 2.

Words used to describe clothing in lost and stolen adverts placed in the *Daily Advertiser*, 1731-1796

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
Colour	Coloured			1		7	2	4	14
	Colours, e.g. 'red'	21	41	24	2	141	23	34	286
	Dark					5	1		6
	Sad-colour	1							1
									307
Fabric	Blond					3			3
	Bombazine					2			2
	Brocade					1			1
	Brussels lace					6			6
	Calico		1			3	1	4	9
	Calico muslin	1					1		2
	Calamanco	1				2			3

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
	Camblet	2	1						3
	Cambric		8			1		1	10
	Canvas		1						1
	Chintz							1	1
	Cloth		1	3		3	3	3	13
	Cotton		5	3	1	12	4	7	32
	Crape					3	2		5
	Damask		3			1			4
	Dimity	1		2		1	5	7	16
	Feather					2			2
	Flannel		1			1		1	3
	Fur		1			2			3
	Fustian					1			1
	Gauze					1			1
	Gingham		1					1	2
	Holland		1	4		1			6
	Irish cloth							1	1
	Kenting						1		1
	Kid						1		1

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
	Lace					4			4
	Lawn		2	3		7		1	13
	Leather					1	1	1	3
	Linen		2	3		7	1		13
	Linen[s] collective	2	4	1		5	2	2	16
	Love					1			1
	Lustring		3			10	2		15
	Lynx skin							1	1
	Mechlin lace					1			1
	Minionet lace					2			2
	Muslin		5	6		25	7	24	67
	Net					3	1		4
	Paduasoy	1	1						2
	Persian	1	1			8	3	1	14
	Plaid					2			2
	Poplin	1							1
	Sable	1			1	1			3
	Sarsenet	1							1
	Satin		2	1		24	3	5	35

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
	Scotch muslin							2	2
	Shalloon						1		1
	Silk	8	12	3		41	9	12	85
	Stuff		2			11	1		14
	Tabby		6			5	1		12
	Thread					1			1
	Thread lace							1	1
	Thread satin	2							2
	Ticking			1		2			3
	Velvet	1	5	1					7
	Worsted					2			2
	Yorkshire stuff						1		1
									461
Fabric quality	Coarse/coarser					3			3
	Fine/finer		1	2		9	1	2	15
	Rich					2	1		3
	Thin		1						1
									22

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
Decoration	Checked		2	1		2		2	7
	Clouded					3			3
	Cottoned					1			1
	Dresden work			3		1			4
	Dyed					1			1
	Embroidered	1							1
	Figured					6			6
	Flounced/flounce					2	2	2	6
	Flowered/flowers	2	6	2		19	4		33
	Fringed/fringe					1	1		2
	Laced		2	4		15	1	7	29
	Plain			4		8		5	17
	Printed			1		1	2	2	6
	Quilted	1	7	2		4	1		15
	Scalloped					3	1		4
	Spotted/spots					4		3	7
	Sprigged/sprigs		1			3			4
	Striped/stripes	2	3	4		18	1	5	33

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
	Tambour					5			5
	Trimmed	1		1		22	6	4	34
	Worked		4			23	2	1	30
									248
Style	Barcelona							1	1
	Fashionable-made							1	1
	India							1	1
	Japan							2	2
	Old fashion					1			1
									6
Age	Almost new/nearly new					2	2		4
	Faded					1			1
	Little the worse for wear					1			1
	New		1	2		9	1	5	18
	Old	1		1		3		1	6
									30

		1731 (261 issues)	1742 (82 issues)	1752 (33 issues)	1760-61 (8 issues)	1772 (296 issues)	1782 (23 issues)	1796 (309 issues)	Total (1012 issues)
Made/not made	Half made-up					1			1
	Made up					1			1
	Not quite finished					1			1
	Unmade/not made					4			4
									7
Clean/dirty	Clean					1			1
	Dirty					2			2
	Foul	1							1
	Never washed					1			1
	Not been washed						1		1
	Wet			2					2
									8
Other	Common			1					1
									1

Conventions and Abbreviations

Conventions

Original spelling and punctuation in all primary sources has been reproduced throughout, unless otherwise indicated. My own insertions have been made in square brackets.

In the currency used throughout this thesis, £1 is made up of 20s (shillings), and 1s is made up of 12d (pence).

Though sources from before 1752 use Lady Day dating, I have taken the year to begin on 1 January and end on 31 December throughout this thesis.

Abbreviations

BOR – Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

BCD – 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Database.

DHC – Dorset History Centre, Dorchester.

ERA – East Riding Archives and Local Studies, Beverly.

EYA – Explore York Libraries & Archives, York.

MSC – Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

OBP – Old Bailey Proceedings.

SCD – Special Collections, University of Durham.

TNA – The National Archives, Kew.

TWA – Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle.

WYASB – West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford.

WYASH – West Yorkshire Archive Service, Halifax.

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- CP.I.1476, 1765-1766.
- CP.I.1480, 1767.
- CP.I.1495, 1766.
- CP.I.1503, 1767-1768.
- CP.I. 1504, 1766-1767.
- CP.I.1505, 1767.
- CP.I. 1506, 1767.
- CP.I.1525, 1766.
- CP.I.1528, 1766.
- CP.I.1530, 1764-1766.
- CP.I.1531, 1765.
- CP.I.1535, 1766.
- CP.I.1536, 1766.

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Parish Records of York Holy Trinity Goodramgate, 1573-1876.

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- WHA.44, Inventory and weights of plate (belonging to Robert Wharton's widow Mary Wharton) showing which items she intends to give away and which to keep, 1756.
- WHA.45, List of weights of plate given by Robert Wharton's widow Mary to her son Richard Wharton, 1756.
- WHA.46, List and weights of plate given by Robert Wharton's widow Mary to her daughters (Catherine) Ettrick and (Elizabeth) Lighton, 1756.
- WHA.47, Letter from Mary Wharton in Gillegat (Gilesgate) to her son concerning the distribution of plate and containing family news, 1756.
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